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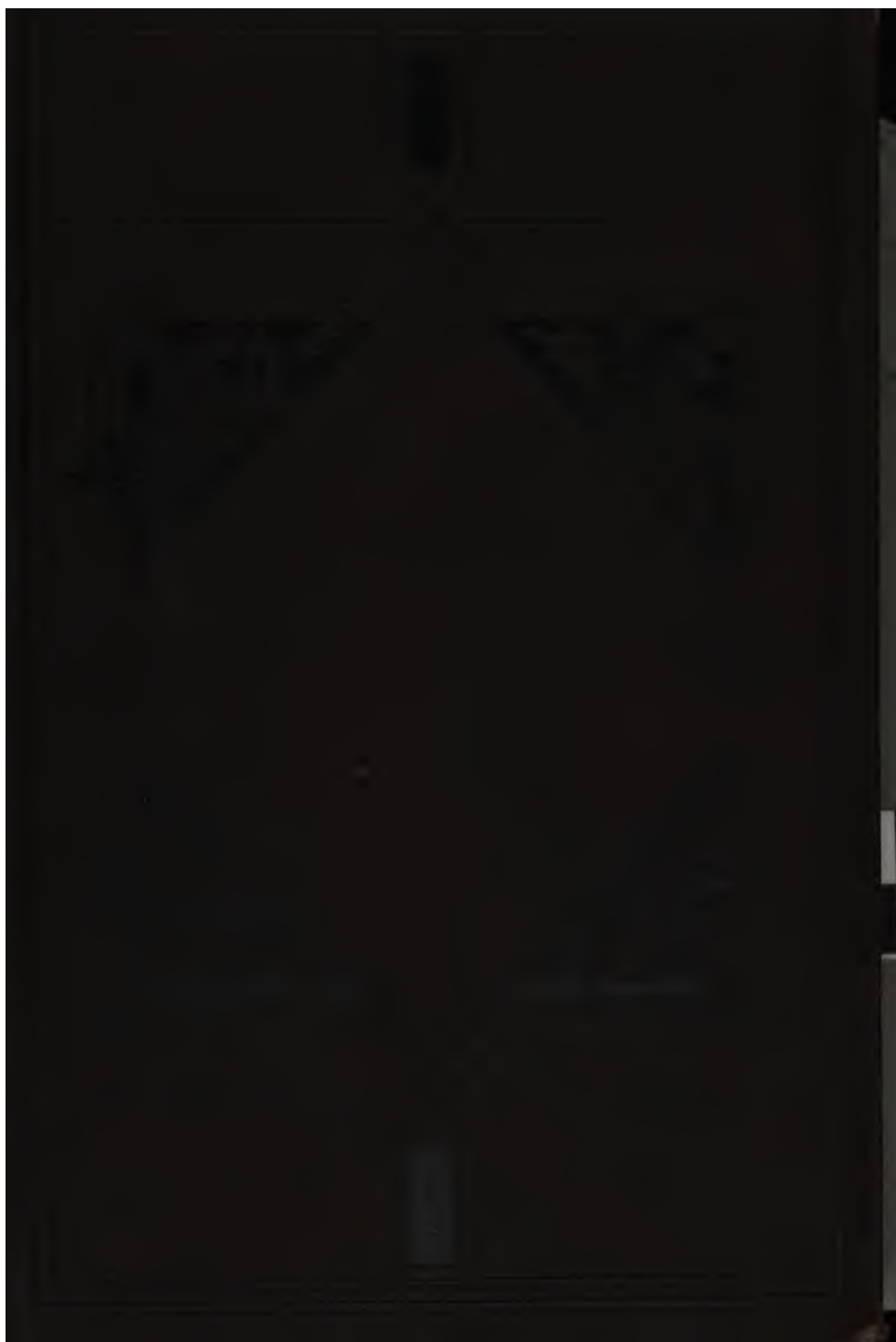
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**HER MOTHER'S DARLING,**



# HER MOTHER'S DARLING.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

"GEORGE GEITH," "TOO MUCH ALONE," "HOME, SWEET HOME,"  
"THE EARL'S PROMISE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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LITTLE QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS.

TO  
ELIZA CHARLOTTE, HARRIETTE LOIS,  
AND  
CONSTANCE MARGARET GREENE,  
THIS STORY OF A YOUNG GIRL'S LIFE  
WHICH,  
FROM SYMPATHY, WILL HAVE AN INTEREST FOR THEM  
OUTSIDE THEIR OWN HAPPIER EXPERIENCE,  
IS,  
IN REMEMBRANCE OF MANY A LOVING WORD  
AND KINDLY TOKEN,  
**Dedicated**  
BY THEIR ATTACHED COUSIN,  
  
THE AUTHOR.

*Weybridge, January, 1877.*



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# HER MOTHER'S DARLING.

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## CHAPTER I.

### QUITE ALONE.

“Is there any danger?” It was Honoria who asked this question of the strange doctor Nannie had in her frantic haste fetched as the nearest and most available—Honoria not pliant, or timid, or gentle, but defiant in her tone, almost crazy with anxiety and suspense.

“Danger!” repeated Doctor Elmes, “pooh! what could have put such an idea into your head? Of course attacks of this kind always appear alarming.”

“Attacks of what kind?” interrupted Honoria.

"Why, anything relating to the heart," he answered. "Undoubtedly your mother's heart is affected, but with care and rest and a little medical attention she may live for years,—outlive you, perhaps."

"Ah! no," said Honoria softly, and all hardness died out of manner and expression as she realized there might be a something even worse than her mother leaving her, namely, her mother being left all alone.

"I will look in again first thing to-morrow morning," went on the doctor. "Of course some one will remain with her during the night?"

"I will," answered Honoria.

"And see she has nourishment, and takes her medicine regularly."

"Everything you tell me to do shall be done," said Honoria.

"There is one thing I should like to tell you to do that I am afraid you would refuse to comply with."

"I know what you mean, but I could not go to bed; if I did I should not be able to sleep."

"Well then, will you eat? Your servant tells me you have touched no food since one o'clock. You asked me just now if there was any danger, and I answered no; but I must add that your mother's life depends on your keeping in good health. If you break down, everything, remember, breaks down."

"I shall not break down," was the answer; "strength has been given me hitherto to do all the work I had to perform, strength will be given to me now."

"I admire your faith," he replied, "but you must do your part in works."

"You need not be afraid," Honoria said. "I will eat, and when the necessity for my watching is over, I will sleep."

When the necessity for her watching was over! How many and many a time



during the course of the months that followed, Doctor Elmes recalled that sentence. When, he often asked himself, would the vigil end and the rest begin; the vigil that could be terminated but by one event; the rest which could only ensue when death had ended all need for wakefulness.

It was heart disease of much longer standing, of much graver import, than Doctor Elmes had at first imagined.

As the twilight shadows creep into a room quietly and stealthily, and darken it at last all of a sudden, the while we are talking most confidentially to a friend, so mortal sickness had stolen to the hearth where mother and daughter chatted over their plans and weaved their phantasies together, and in a moment the blackness of night, the precursor of the one ineffable hour, the blackest to the lookers on at all events which life holds, was around the pair.

What did it avail if the disease fluctuated, as it did; what did it signify that the treatment ordered by some fresh doctor seemed to arrest the progress of the malady for a few days?

In their hearts, though they feared to speak the truth each to the other, though in point of fact they never did openly speak it, mother and daughter knew no reprieve man could bring might mean—life.

But yet as we cling to the last few minutes ere a parting even for a short time with those we love becomes inevitable as we sit on the steamer's deck, till we are almost carried away with the one passenger who is leaving us, as we stand at the carriage window while the train waits for the signals to be lowered long after every possible word of farewell has been uttered; so, in like manner, only with that feverish earnestness, and silent persistency which

impending death produces in some natures—would it did in all!—Honorina caught at each poor straw which might delay even for a moment her mother's gentle passage from the river to the sea.

Not very far off lay that sea, unknown, unexplored; so free of danger to the eyes that had never feared to look at the land which to some of us seems very far off; so full of agony to the girl who when the time came could only stand on the shore and strain her eyes over that darkling waste of waters, where all she loved had gone down, where for her was no sail of hope, no sun, no moon.

Honorina fought against the progress towards that ocean, the tide of which is ever ebbing on the shores of time, and flowing into eternity; fought as a nature like hers always does fight, madly.

What though she might only gain hours, they alone were worth all the price she

paid for them. Nay, if she could gain nothing, she felt in her soul that even to have tried to gain, would prove a comfort to her in the grey, lonely silence which she knew must ensue when the faint breathing of the invalid ceased for ever, when the feeble light of life should finally cease to flicker.

Was there aught Mrs. Legerton lacked during her illness that money might have procured?

If so, it must have been something which it never entered even the prodigal mind of a west-end doctor to conceive could prove beneficial or acceptable.

And as the end drew nearer, Honoria grew more lavish, just as when shipwreck seems imminent, every other earthly valuable is willingly flung overboard in order to give one more chance for life.

So long as her mother retained sufficient

strength to remonstrate against such expenditure, Honoria had to practise pious frauds which never more than half deceived the patient ; but after an illness has lasted for some time, there comes a dimness of perception as well as a lassitude of thought, which causes all things to be regarded as through a mist, dimly and uncertainly.

It came to that ere long, save at fitful intervals, with Mrs. Legerton. She took what her daughter's love procured for her without trouble or question, unless it might be an occasional, " Can we afford this, dear ? "

When famous physicians drove down to see this insignificant patient, their visits conveyed to her mind no idea of fees given secretly, and received as if such good things as guineas were the furthest from their thoughts. To Mrs. Legerton, the greatest of them all, who indeed refused to take any fee whatever, seemed no more wonderful

an individual than Doctor Elmes from round the corner.

All fame, all riches, all celebrity, together with poverty and anxiety, merged at last into vague shadows seen through that twilight which comes when the feebleness of the body weakens the powers of the mind.

It was very gradual, mercifully gradual, after that first blow dealt, as it seemed to Honoria, with such cruel swiftness; and the girl could recall in the days still to come, nights when she sat listening to the faint breathing heard through the stillness—hours when she and disease fought together for mastery,—and the very strength of her affection enabled her to gain a temporary victory.

All this time she did nothing. She never attempted to do anything in the way of earning money. At first she wrote little notes to the parents of her pupils, explaining that she would be unable to give any

lessons for a week or two, in consequence of her mother's illness, and these notes were answered in all cases with civility, and in many with sympathy; but when a further delay came and then another, her patrons waxed irate and told her some of those worldly truths which seem so hard to people still young enough, and inexperienced enough, to believe that because they are sick or sorry the whole scheme of creation must come to a standstill.

"I am sure no one can have been more patient than myself, Miss Legerton," said the mother of one of those snub-nosed children, to whom Mr. Litchford had once so disparagingly referred. She was seated, as she spoke, in Mrs. Legerton's parlour, arrayed in a black satin dress, a red shawl, a black velvet bonnet tied with red ribbons and adorned with red roses. She was extremely fat, wore a huge brooch, wheezed a little as she talked, and altogether did not look

very nice, while with a heightened complexion and voice sharp and somewhat shrill, she stated her own perfections :

“I don’t want to be inconsiderate to nobody,” she said “and I have kept Florence and Blanche practising, so that they might not lose all they have learnt. It is hard for you, no one can say it ain’t. Anybody who has been a daughter herself must feel for you, as the saying is ; but as Mr. Osmond remarked to me this morning, ‘Mary, is Miss Leger-ton agoing to teach those children any more, or ain’t she? that is all I want to know.’ So you see, my dear, I was forced in a manner, as one may say, to come round ; and I am certain if you just name a day and stick to it, Mr. Osmond won’t object. He has a great notion of business, as is only right and fit, he earning his living by it, but he has the feelings of a man for all that.”

Honoraria rose and went to the window,



feeling as if she were choking. Already she had received about a dozen notes, all couched in language more or less civil, but still peremptory. Never before had pupils been so anxious for lessons; never before had parents seemed to rate her instructions as so valuable.

She had an offer from a school which she would have jumped to accept three months previously, but now she almost resented what she mentally termed the selfish inhumanity of people, who wished a daughter to desert her mother's sick bed, in order to teach their children to play more or less indifferently, or to sing mawkish ballads to admiring visitors.

So far her home had been precisely what home is to hundreds of persons possessed of a certain, though limited income, a little domain, into which no stranger had the right to enter,—with the conduct of which not even the nearest friend could claim to

interfere ; and now in a moment, as it seemed to Honoria, the walls were thrown down, the fences destroyed, and people who had not a thought in common with her, made themselves free to criticize what she chose to do or to leave undone.

They were entitled to do so ; therein lay the sting. Of her own free will, or rather perhaps of a necessity stronger than her own will, she had undertaken certain duties, and had been paid for performing them.

And Mrs. Osmond, and people such as she, had not treated her badly, nay, rather in the depths of her rebellious heart they had treated her well and considerately. What was her mother to them, she thought bitterly, more than any other girl's mother ? If their cook's nearest and dearest lay dying, should that serve as an excuse for an ill-served dinner ? if one of the young men behind Mr. Osmond's counter were going to attend his sweetheart's funeral in the after-

noon, should that fact excuse his directing a parcel wrongly in the morning? Certainly not. Nay, even as Honoria well knew, if Mrs. Osmond, or Blanche, or Florence, or the whole three of them were sick unto death, would not Mr. Osmond attend to his customers just the same, as though all belonging to him were blithe and well; ask the rich stockbroker's wife, what he "could have the pleasure of showing her," and inquire of the little drab sent from the nearest dress-maker's, "What is it for you, my dear?"

She had seen enough to know that such things were, and of necessity; but now they came home to herself, which fact with all of us makes a difference. She was perfectly well aware that she had treated people who had treated her well with a certain discourtesy, but it only made Honoria more bitter to reflect that at such a time courtesy should have been expected. The day had come when the fashion of her countenance

altered. No more sunny smiles and bright looks for a world which returned sunshine and brightness ; rather instead hardness and anguish, because of the sorrow man could do nothing to alleviate.

All this and more passed through Honoria's mind as she stood for a few seconds by the window trying to recall some form of decently civil speech in which she might reply to Mrs. Osmond's little harangue.

"I am sorry," she began, turning her head towards her visitor, the while the cold winter sun fell upon her white haggard face ; "I am very sorry to have caused you and Mr. Osmond so much inconvenience. I ought to have come to some clear understanding with you and with myself long ago. I went on hoping and hoping my mother would get better, in which case I should have resumed teaching ere this. Now, it is only right for me to tell you

that while she remains ill I cannot give any lessson."

"But, bless me, Miss Legerton, what do you intend to do? Your mother may last for years yet."

"God grant it," said Honoria, in the tone of one who knew her prayer to be perfectly vain.

"And you'll excuse *me*, but if she does, how do you think of going on about money? It ain't my affair, of course; but I have always understood you to say it was a great matter for you to get pupils, and that you wanted to work up a connection."

"You are quite right; I did say so."

"And if you lose your pupils—because you can't expect parents to wait for you for ever"—

"I do not expect them to wait any longer," Honoria answered. "I have no doubt I shall lose my pupils and my connection; but I cannot help that. No con-

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sideration could induce me to leave my mother."

"But why don't you hire a nurse if that clean, respectable old servant, that I am sure looks a credit to any house, is not able to attend to her?"

"Nannie is very good, but she is not the same as I am."

"But do think, Miss Legerton, I really am speaking as much in your interests as ours. Suppose this illness goes on for a long time, how ever shall you manage if everything is going out and nothing coming in. I am not a curious person, I am thankful to say, or one given to encourage gossip, but one cannot help hearing, you know, and I am told you get everything any doctor can think of ordering."

"I hope I do; if the doctors ordered anything I could not get, it would make me very miserable."

"But all that must cost a heap of money.

I am sure, when our poor little Franky died"—

"I have enough to go on with for the present," said Honoria, cutting relentlessly across a reminiscence she had heard recalled over and over again. "When our store is exhausted I must think what I shall do; in any case, however, I shall not teach while my mother is ill."

"Then all I can say is, Miss Legerton, I think you have treated us shabby. There, I have said it, and I mean it. We paid you well and regular; we made our hours accommodate you; we never asked you in the cold weather to sit in a room without a fire, though our own children practise with only shawls about them; and if you had taken it, there was always a glass of wine, or a cup of tea, or a basin of soup at your service. When we heard your ma was ill, we let weeks go by, and never uttered a word of complaint, and now, when I do

speak, without by your leave, or with your leave, you throw up your engagement, and bid us get what teacher we can."

It is wonderful the effect hearing our sins rehearsed by an opposing counsel has upon us. Under the torrent of Mrs. Osmond's eloquence, Honoria stood appalled. Hitherto she had felt herself to be so entirely right, that the possibility of any other person entertaining a different opinion never crossed her mind.

Now, however, she began to see that there are two sides to every question humanity can have placed before it, and she answered accordingly, almost humbly,

"Indeed, Mrs. Osmond, I am very sorry to have seemed to treat you with discourtesy. Had I foreseen, had I imagined how I should be placed, I would of course at once have asked you to look out for some one else to teach your little girls. I am not ungrateful for your kindness; indeed I am



not ; and I did not mean to appear rude. I know I ought to have told you long ago I should not be able to give any more lessons."

"Begging your pardon, Miss Legerton, that is just what you ought not to have done. You undertook a duty, and you should have discharged it. If you was going to be a nurse, you ought not to have begun teaching ; that is what Mr. Osmond says. He says, 'I wonder what my customers would think if I told them they could not be served because I had to cook the dinner ;' and he is quite right. We were willing to try to suit your convenience ; but we do not like having ours quite lost sight of. As Mr. Osmond says, that is the worst of having to do with gentlefolks, and people who have just enough money to keep their heads above water. They think they can do just what they like, whereas, Mr. Osmond says, if we had

only had the luck to begin with the organist's daughter at the first, we should have been money in pocket, and had somebody glad enough to come whenever we wanted her, now her father is dead, and her mother left with only twenty pound a year, and four children besides Marianne."

"That was an error in judgment which you can now repair," said Honoria icily; then relenting as Mrs. Osmond rose and took up her skirts and prepared to shake the dust of that house off her feet, she added,

"Let us part good friends. Though we do not agree in our opinions, still you will believe I am more vexed than I can express to have offended you; and I fancy when you come to think the matter over you will not consider it strange that I wish to nurse my mother myself. If you were ill you would like to have Florry or Blanche near you."

"That is true enough—and I always did

take to you, Miss Legerton—but still I think that, as Mr. Osmond says, it ain't always for us to be considering what we want to do, but what we ought to do."

"Well, Mrs. Osmond, I want to stay with my mother, and I believe I ought to stay with her," said Honoria, and so they parted, and so in somewhat similar fashion Miss Legerton lost all her pupils, and was left to attend to her mother without let or hindrance from any one.

Day succeeded day, and week followed week; the former employments of Honoria's life were abandoned, the old interests forgotten as though they had never existed.

During that period the world meant for her two rooms, between which a dying woman alternated. What to her were the crowds of people dwelling in London, the hundreds and thousands who each day passed by the end of the street where she lived, intent on their own hopes, pleasures, sorrows, cares?

Ah! had there been but one amongst them capable of conferring upon her mother health and strength! But there was not, and Honoria knew it.

She had forgotten about her song, about her disappointment, about her success, about her hopes; all these things were laid aside, to be taken up again it might be at some future period, but laid aside none the less completely for the time being.

So listless was she concerning external events, so utterly did one thought absorb her, that when the proof at last arrived from Mr. Lambe she never opened the parcel till her mother asking feebly, "What is that, Honie?" she pulled off the wrapper, and carelessly answering, "Only that song," would have put it on the piano, had not Mrs. Legerton begged that the music might be given to her.

"I shall be back in a minute or two, mamma," said her daughter. "I only want

to speak to Nannie about going for some more of that last medicine."

She looked at Mrs. Legerton as she spoke, looked at the figure propped up with pillows, at the wasted hands holding the printed sheet, at the tired dim eyes vainly trying to read the printed words which once in manuscript had been to her full of a mournful significance.

But the story was ended, the tale told. It had not been much of a story or of a tale, perhaps; yet it contained the record of a human life, and the life was over.

Softly the fingers relaxed — the sheets fluttered to the ground — in a moment Honoria was beside her mother; with one hand she raised the drooping head, with the other she rang out such a peal on the bell as had never previously been heard in the house during their quiet tenancy.

"Run for the doctor; any doctor, instantly," she said to Nanny, who ap-

peared in answer to the summons, and without waiting for bonnet or shawl, without a word of question, the faithful servant ran up the street and into the high-road, where she accosted a doctor she knew merely by sight, and requested him to come and see her mistress.

“What is the matter?” he asked,

“I don’t know,” she moaned, “please, come quick.”

He came as quickly as he could. Comparatively he was a young man, and with his buoyant step he followed the servant where she led.

Almost immediately he found himself in the room with two women, one leaning back against a pillow, the other kneeling beside her.

“Is this the patient?” he said, stepping close up to the chair, and taking the drooping hand in his—then—

“Good God! she is dead,” he exclaimed.

"You have brought me," he added, turning to Nannie, "to see a dead woman."

"What does he say, Nannie?" asked Her Mother's Darling, surveying the scene with fixed vacant eyes.

"Take her away," said the doctor. "See to her." And he departed.

So Mrs. Legerton died; and at the same time the best part of Honoria Legerton died also for many a year to come.

## CHAPTER II.

### FRIENDLY ARGUMENTS.

THE same house in the narrow quiet street, the same room, but no longer kept in the lovely order of yore. It was clean, for if Honoria's own instincts had failed to insist on that first necessary of all decent life, Nannie would have worked her fingers to the bone to keep the windows bright and clean, the paint free from grime, and the furniture innocent of dust.

So, as has been said, the room was clean, but it was untidy, and moreover it was poor.

The hands that had formerly so quietly



and deftly replaced books on their shelves, music in the Canterbury, papers in their case; that had arranged the simple ornaments, and given even to flowers a fresh beauty and grace, might never touch book or flower again; and from the rooms, and from out the house, had gone in consequence some subtle essence—something equivalent to the scent of spring violets, or old-fashioned roses, which could return no more—no more—alas! for ever.

In our passage through life we are able to get very many good new things; at all events, it is as a rule our own faults if we do not, and some very fair counterfeits of the old; but as for the dear old life, the dear old loves, the dear old hopes, and, better almost than all, the old faith of what the future *must* have in store for us, and of which we have unhappily lived long enough to prove the utter falsity—these things, friends, just like our youth, can come back

and sit by the familiar hearth never again—ah ! never.

From out the house she beautified, the poor, cheap, externally unbeautiful house, Mrs. Legerton had departed ; her place knew her no more. In a neighbouring cemetery, not devoid of some interesting associations, ancient and modern, there was a fresh headstone and a grave kept always adorned with flowers ; and in Honoria's heart there was a great void, an awful rebellion, an utter indifference, a sickening, wasting sorrow.

She would not even go to church, she who had been brought up never to miss going once a day at all events, even in the worst of weather. There was not much for her to hear certainly, beyond the comforting service, could any one have induced her to go and listen to sermons full of platitudes, to cut and dried sentences which prove as satisfying to a man's soul as the typi-

cal scriptural stone to one hungering for bread.

The girl wanted spiritual bread. She would have gone to church had she known where even a crumb of it could be obtained to satisfy her sorrowing appetite. As it was, she reared her rebellious head and failed in her sorrow to go and hear the chance word from even some very poor preacher, which, I humbly think, might have proved of great comfort.

Just then she could not see clearly—she could not understand. From her had been taken all she loved—all that loved her; and although she endured (such natures as hers can endure), she could not feel resigned.

Further, she was not merely lonely, and almost friendless, she was also poor. Not an article in the room but bore evidence of the closest, hardest economy.

Originally the furniture had been of the

least expensive description, and already the pattern was wearing off the cheap carpet.

The coverings of the chairs were thread-bare, the veneer was peeling off the tables, the curtains were darned to an extent pitiful to behold.

Poverty, decent, respectable, self-sacrificing, proud poverty, presented itself not obtrusively, but sadly in the faded silk of the cottage pianoforte; in the poor black dress that hung so loosely about Honoria's figure; in the manifold patches on Nannie's gown, and that indescribable expression in the face of the elderly servant and the young mistress, which to the initiated tells not merely of poor, but insufficient food.

In a word, these honest people, duly paying their way—and getting no thanks or praise for doing so—had come almost to their straw a-day.

A cup of the weakest tea for breakfast,

with a slice of dry bread or some bread-and-butter—the same bill of fare for dinner—again repeated for the third and last meal of the day ; this, with a slice of plaice when fish was cheap, or a bony chump of mutton when Honoria could save or make an extra shilling or two, constituted the food of mistress and maid, week in and week out.

And it was beginning to tell upon both of them.

At Antlet luxuries in the way of living were, of course, impossible, but still, though the fare might have been plain, it was plentiful, good, and wholesome. The water was pure, the milk rich, the vegetables fresh, the bread home-made, the butter sweet and tempting.

“If we were but back there again, Miss Honie,” sighed Nannie one night when the future looked particularly gloomy.

“We should starve,” answered Honoria.

“I can earn something here, but I could earn nothing there; and nowhere in all the wide world, Nannie, can people live without money.”

By that time there was nothing except what Honie could earn, and little enough that sometimes proved. She had allowed her old pupils to slip from her—she had estranged the sympathies of their parents—she had so far overtaxed her own powers that her voice was once again feeble, and at times almost reedy. Even Mr. Lambe refused to buy her songs. He was willing, nay, anxious, to stand her friend, but he said, and said truly, she must do her part. .

On the day we re-cross the threshold of the house from which Mrs. Legerton had months and months previously been carried, that kindly gentleman, seated in the chair where the mother had so often waited expectant for her daughter, was once again

exhorting Honoria to put the dead past from her, and, having to live, face the present and the future with courage.

"You are wrong, my dear; you are wrong," he said. "If your mother were here she would tell you what I tell you. God never intended that the dead should be hindrances to the living. If every one were to act as you have done, the world would become unendurable."

"You cannot understand," Honoria was beginning, when he interrupted her.

"I can understand. I have loved and I have lost. I am old now, but I was young once, and within a short year after I was two-and-twenty I followed father, mother, wife, and baby to the grave. I did not marry again for fifteen years; and though I am as fond of my present wife as man can be, I assure you the trouble, which is now getting on for fifty years old, is often just as fresh to me as it was the first day."

Honoria's face softened a little.

"I am horribly selfish, I suppose," she said, "but I cannot feel for other people's sorrows as I ought. It seems to me as if there had never been any grief like my grief; and as no one can understand that, I do not talk about the trouble which is always with me."

"And for you, of course, no grief is like your grief. It is just like pain—you have to feel you have to bear it. Another man's toothache may be as bad as mine or worse, but it is not so bad to my thinking, because I feel the agony of the one, and I cannot feel the twitching of the other."

"That is quite true," sighed Honoria, who about the time mentioned was having her full share of neuralgia and headache and toothache, and those aches of all sorts which follow in the wake of low living and insufficient food.

"The end of it," went on Mr. Lambe,



"must prove the workhouse. Ever since that evening when we renewed our friendship, you have been drifting from bad to worse, and there will come a day when you cannot teach and to beg are ashamed, and then what do you suppose will happen?"

"God knows," answered Honoria, "for I am very friendless."

"You are not friendless, but you are headstrong," said Mr. Lambe. "You have but to make an effort to do what your mother would bid you do were she living, to go out into the world and form acquaintances, to make money, and become a prosperous young woman. Do you think you owe no duty to that faithful servant who is starving here with you, to the family of which you are the last representative, to God who has given you wonderful talents. My dear, my dear, rouse yourself. The dead cannot be brought back to life;

the dead don't want to be brought back to life, of that you may be quite certain ; and what we, the living, have to do is to perform our daily work to the best of our ability, and try to make those with whom we are thrown in contact as happy as we can."

"What do you want me to do then ?" asked Honoria wearily.

"I want you to come with us to Mrs. Mirand's on the tenth ?"

"And my mother not dead a twelve-month ?"

"When the wife of a labouring man dies, he has to go out and work as if she were living ?"

"But this is not work, it is pleasure."

"It will not be pleasure to you ; it is work, needful and necessary, that I ask you to undertake. I want to get you out of yourself even for an hour. I want you to sing. I want you to get rid of the rank weed, indifference, which is killing every good gift

you possess. I want you to pass out of the darkness into the light, to get into an atmosphere that shall enable you to write songs I can buy. I cannot purchase gloom and despondency, and you have written nothing for months past which might not have been produced by a man about to cut his throat."

Honoria almost laughed. In her best days she had always been able to do that, even when the laugh went against herself.

"But surely there is gloom in the world."

"So much in reality that the world does not want it in its recreations. It likes pathos; something it can cry over decorously, and feel its eyes look all the brighter and better for the exercise, but it does not require gloom; it hates it, and it is quite right. Who would have a sad face always near him if he could have a bright one? Charles Lamb was correct: 'A six

weeks' old kitten'—I quote from memory and may be quite wrong as to the Kitten's age —'should be found in every house.' Fancy a kitten here! Why, the place would be metamorphosed directly."

Honie looked thoughtful. Then she said, "I think I will get the kitten for Nannie. She must often be lonely when I am out."

"But the kitten must be fed," answered Mr. Lambe, "and as matters stand I don't think you would be justified in adding another mouth to the establishment."

"Oh!" cried Honoria, "I am afraid I have been wrong. I have thought only for myself; never once for Nannie—poor, faithful, uncomplaining Nannie! My mother would have considered her. What must I do, Mr. Lambe? Tell me, and I will do it."

"You must go out into the world," he said; "you must see people, hear them talk

and talk yourself; you must sing, you must get a different class of pupils, you must earn a lot of money, eat and drink, and, if God sees fit hereafter, be merry. He never intended that any one of us should exist for ever in twilight or in darkness. There is the morning glory and the midday heat for the wretchedest creature upon whom the sun ever shone."

"But I have no dress," said Honoria reverting to the original question of Mrs. Mirand's "Evening," and with a woman's instinct putting forward the last possible excuse still in reserve.

"Genius requires no adornment. But, at all events, you have a dress. Wear the silk you had on when I came down a few Sundays ago. I am not going to take you to a ball. There is a station near here. Well, come over to our house, dine with us quietly and comfortably. We will all go together to Mrs. Mirand's, and you can

return and stop at our house. That is easy enough, so easy that I am surprised to think you ever made any difficulty about the matter. Now, now, now—no further objections. I want my song to be successful, and it never can be successful unless you bring yourself a little to the front. Good-bye, and God bless you and teach you a little of His Wisdom, without which you will fare very badly I fear.”

And fearing further discussion and remonstrance, Mr. Lambe took his hat and departed, merely saying, in a low tone to Nannie as she opened the door to let him out,

“I have been talking to your young lady about moping. She must go out. She ought to rouse herself. If she speaks to you concerning what I have said, keep her up to the mark.”

“I will try, sir ; and Heaven bless you !” answered Nannie.

But Honoria did not speak to Nannie. She toiled upstairs and looked at the dress Mr. Lambe had indicated as presentable, and then went out and bought some yards of common lace (*that* purchase penetrated Honie's heart, for she had the instincts of a gentlewoman as regarded shams) and two or three other little articles indispensable to even the simplest toilette.

When she returned she held up the parcel to Nannie's gaze, and said,

"I have been buying some lace to try and make my old black silk look smart. Mr. Lambe wants me to go to a party with him and his wife."

"For any sake then, Miss Honie, give me out the silk and let me see what I can do with it. They do say here in London that if you spread wet muslin out over woollen goods and iron them up sharp, they come out a trifle better nor new. If you can find me a bit of old ribbon I'll just try if that's lies or fact."

"It is not fact, Nannie," answered Honoria. "Nothing can make that silk look like new again. Nevertheless, I shall go to the party. I shall go."

"And not one of the ladies there will look like you, Miss Honie. Still I should dearly love you to get a new gown. Can't we do it *any how*? I don't mind living on dry bread a bit."

"You dear old Nannie!" said Honoria drawing out her purse, "Look, here, I have put aside the rent, and that is every half-penny I have in the world until Mrs. Marshall sees fit to pay me. I believe you would almost starve yourself for my sake; but I cannot have you quite starve. What should I do without you? and now about furbishing up my rusty silk."

The dress was brought down, examined, mended, ironed. The slits in the gathers were carefully run up, the frayed edges turned in; Nannie went for ammonia and



sponged the mud and dust spots out as far as it was possible to do so. Then she tried the "London plan" of smoothing the material, and found it so successful she held up the skirt in triumph and exclaiming,

"Look, Miss Honie, it is almost as good as new!" smiled triumphantly as she pictured her young lady looking better than "anybody in the room."

Nannie had never in her life seen a lady dressed for the evening, and Honie, who had, could not find it in her heart to tell the faithful creature she would appear to the fine people she was about to meet a most wonderful spectacle—a dingy sparrow amongst a crowd of humming-birds.

## CHAPTER III.

MRS. MIRAND "AT HOME."

"THIS is kind." "How *do* you do, dear Mr. Lambe." "*Delighted* I am sure to make your acquaintance, Miss Legerton."

These utterances were all drawled out in languid succession by Mrs. Mirand, a more than middle-aged lady, fat, childless, affected. She was enormously large, her neck was like snow, and very insufficiently draped; indeed, as some good-natured friend remarked, had she only cut a few inches off her train to cover her body, the general effect might have been better. Her complexion was fair; so fair, indeed, as to

warrant the comparison frequently instituted by—once again—her friends between her and an eminently foolish-looking doll. Her eyes were of the lightest and least-decided blue; her hair, fine as floss, was of the natural colour of silk; her mouth was less a mouth than a slit puckered down at the corners by reason of a perpetual smile, altogether a charming woman in the opinion of those who have a fancy for ladies who appear to be merely pretty idiots

But Mrs. Mirand was no idiot. She knew what she wanted, and she got it. She married for money, and she got it. She used the money to secure a certain position, and she obtained and kept it. She ruled her husband with a rod of iron, but he never felt the yoke. Her servants were treated with a strict if not merciful justice, which enabled her to get even out of that unpromising quarter a full return for all her outlay.

As for celebrity, she made a masterly move for that and achieved it. She could not play, she could not sing, she could not paint; for years she had been too fat to dance. Had she been able to ride, she could not, in these degenerate days of thready two-year olds, have bought a horse fit to carry her. She could not row, and no boatman particularly cared to carry her. Early in her married life she discovered that money cannot compete advantageously with more money, and although she was the daughter of an Admiral, a fact all her friends knew by ear, still it is not always possible to compass success in London through the memory of a parent who was presumably very much like anybody else.


Accordingly, Mrs. Mirand having secured a husband, an establishment, and an income, began to consider how she could next obtain celebrity, and foolish though she

might appear to her dearest friends, the lady proved able to carry her point.

Long ago, I remember seeing a man who became subject to such fits of insanity about the time his half-yearly rent was considerably overdue, that the bailiffs objected to try and compel payment.

When the crisis was over, and the matter in some way arranged, he used to confide to his friends the statement that it "required a very wise man to act the fool."

Mrs. Mirand and that individual might have shaken hands, and felt unfeigned admiration, each for the talent of the other. No one living, I imagine, except her husband, her tradespeople, and her servants, thought Mrs. Mirand a clever woman, and yet she did things that no woman who had appeared clever could have compassed. She got *everybody* who had ever done anything to her house—while people who had never done anything remarkable, hungered and thirsted



to enter the charmed precincts. Jew and Gentile, Turk and Christian, Red Indian and Eastern Prince, her hospitality was wide enough to welcome them all! People who wished to pander to her love of celebrities brought her tidings of the newest thing in the way of lions, as one might tell a careful capitalist of a neat investment in ground-rents.

Was there a probable *prima donna*, a certain Italian patriot, a Carlist of note, a returned Smith O'Brienite, a Mormon, or one of Mrs. Stowe's favourite niggers in London, she or he at once received a card and perfumed little billet from Mrs. Mirand.

If she could have found out where Nana Sahib lay *perdu* in any part of the world, she would have written to him. Nay, I believe if any murderer of eminence could have been present at one of her "Evenings," the night before Calcraft officiated, she had died happy.

There is always some other good life lacks to make it perfect; and Mrs. Mirand could not say, "Palmer was here a few hours before he gave Cook that little dose of strychnine. Sat in the very chair Sir James now occupies, my dear;" or, "Mrs. Manning was good enough to look in for half an hour, dressed in the very black satin—you know—so sad."

Her rooms had, it is true, been graced by the presence of many a person who afterwards became the nine days' wonder of newspaper-reading Europe, but that was unhappily before they won their spurs.

"Yes; he came with my dear old friend Mr. or Mrs. So-and-So," as the case might be, Mrs. Mirand was wont to lament, "and I was civil to him of course, but nothing more, nothing. Now what would I not give to have cultivated him a little, asked him to luncheon, and had a few minutes' quiet chat. But how *could* I tell

he would embezzle forty millions of money and then commit suicide."

How indeed, Mrs. Mirand, any more than you could predicate that meek-looking little Mrs. M——, whom you snubbed, would run off with the Prince of Formosa, or Count Almaraldia throw his wife into a mesmeric trance from which he forgot to waken her, or that the plain, heavy-looking man who came to one of your 'At Homes,' with a Lord who shot himself the year Geva won the Derby, should, for more years than any lady would care to count, have been residing at Portland under painfully strict supervision.

No woman can be omniscient, neither can any man for that matter, and Mrs. Mirand was scarcely to blame, inasmuch as she failed to recognise, save with the coldest greeting, some male or female creature who had as yet "done nothing."

If you think of it, dear reader, some of



us may have sat beside the late Mr. Bravo at dinner, and failed even to catch his name. He may have given some reader his views concerning the New Opera House, and that reader may, in the interests of a favourite entrée, have turned a deaf ear to his remarks, never imagining the manner of how he met with his death, would become a matter of such interest as to convulse a nation and set households hitherto united at enmity.

Mrs. Mirand was in a like strait with the future celebrities of her time.

If only, only, she could have engaged a prophet ! It was stated amongst her friends she did try the experiment, and that one of his future "Emperors" made his way into the Mirand mansion when the family was absent from town, and annexed the plate. The man was caught, the bulk of the plate returned, (very little of it was silver or gold,) and the affair hushed up.

Afterwards Mrs. Mirand trusted to her own genius and that of her tried friends, and was rewarded for her prudence by finding, if she and they sometimes made mistakes, they did not prove so disastrous as to require the intervention of Detective Murdock and a Bow street Magistrate.

"Dear Mr. Lambe," went on the lady, whose proclivities and successes have been described at, perhaps, too great a length, "how good it seems to see you, you come here so seldom."

"That is my loss," he answered gravely, "but you know I am a busy man, and a sad stay-at-home. Sometimes I think I am growing old and rusty. Who have you here to night?" he added, hurriedly preventing some stereotyped rejoinder from his hostess. "Heaps of people, I suppose. Very new, very nice, and very famous."

"A few," sighed the lady; "only a very, very few. Heaps, of course, whose

fame is *un fait accompli*, but of new less than I can almost ever remember."

"I fear there are not a dozen fresh faces in the room — faces to be known, I mean. Let me think. There is Captain Jones, just home from China, who was one of the six hundred; lost his arm, as you will see, poor fellow. Lieutenant Brown, who went out to look for Livingstone, was laid up with jungle fever, fell into the hands of a native chief, was compelled to marry his daughter, and who is now," lowering her voice judiciously, "dying for love of my dear friend Lady Jane Galloper, who hopes ere long to get her divorce. So interesting, so touching!"

"And—" suggested Mr. Lambe.

"Oh! there's Mr. Robinson, who was closed in by icebergs for eighteen months. Poor dear man! the bears actually ate one sleeve out of his waterproof; he is going to give it to me. We have Colonel

Thompson, too, who spent twelve hours up in a tree while a man-eating tiger kept watch at the bottom; and last and best of all, there is Midshipman Smith, you see that young beardless fellow, the sole survivor of Her Majesty's Ship, 'Dauntless.' You remember the excitement about the 'Dauntless' that never was heard of after leaving the Cape. He lived on sea-birds' eggs for two years, having clung to a spar and drifted to a rock in the Atlantic; and he so hates the sight of an egg now that his mother and sisters have been obliged to discontinue using them."

"How remarkable!" ejaculated Mr. Lambe.  
"Really, Mrs. Mirand, you do succeed in getting together the most wonderful people. Is there any one here to-night who has won his spurs a little nearer home, and a little more recently?"

"Yes, oh! yes," said Mrs. Mirand, with the deprecating air of a zoologist who,

having secured some rare animal, does not wish to be considered vain of his good fortune. “ *Very* few, but still I do flatter myself remarkable. We have Miss Arguer who painted that wonderful ‘Sowing and Reaping’ in last year’s Academy. She has been abroad for months past, but she promised me her first leisure evening in England, and she is here—that quiet-looking young lady with her hair dressed boy-fashion talking to Mr. Worthing, who performed that wonderful operation upon the Prince of Goldlands, you know; and there is Herrington, who wrote that wonderful poem, ‘Peeping Tom’; and Mr. Chevril, the author of ‘The Spitalfield’s Silk Weaver.’ ”

“ ‘The Spitalfield’s Silk Weaver,’ ” repeated Mr. Lambe.

“ Yes, of that wonderful book. You remember no one could find out anything about the author. One has been told he

is an atheist, a gambler, a murderer, a dissenting minister, a dignitary of the Church; indeed, some one said he knew for a fact the book was written by a not very late Prime Minister, but by the merest chance I hit upon the right man—really a man one might have talked to for a month, and imagined there was nothing more in him than there is in ninety-nine out of a hundred."

"I should like to speak to him," observed Mr. Lambe.

"My husband will introduce you to him with the greatest pleasure. He is somewhere about if you will kindly look for him. Ah! dear Miss Rodwell, I *scarcely* hoped to see you this evening."

"I ought not to be here," answered the lady so addressed. "But, you know, let duty call me ever so imperatively elsewhere, dear Mrs. Mirand, I never can resist *you*."

"So kind, so good, so like you. When I see you come in I always say to myself, 'This evening is certain to be a success. Miss Rodwell is a host in herself.' Too impertinent of me to ask — but *have* you brought any new songs?"

"A few—nothing of any importance, except that pretty little ballad Mr. Mirand published some time ago, and which, curiously enough, I never happened to hear of until after I received your invitation." (Oh! Miss Rodwell.) "It is really charming, but of course I need not tell you that it is so."

"Do you know, my dear, I have *never* heard it? Who is it by? What is it called?"

"It is called the 'Old, old Story,' and the composer styles herself, 'Honorina.' That is all I can tell you about the matter."

How odd it all seemed to the actual

Honorina, standing close at hand — how unreal !

Was it true—could it be true she had done anything worth talking about in that wonderful assemblage ? That she might hear no more about herself, though her ears were greedy for any flattery, she stepped back a pace or two, and soon by the ever-increasing crowd found herself separated from Mr. Lambe, and standing close to the famous Miss Arguer.

Never before had Honie seen such an assemblage. Her poor experience of society had been of large rooms sparsely furnished with guests—rooms the ends of which were lost in a dim perspective ; guests who sat on chairs and ottomans, leaving great tracts of country unoccupied, across which it was a terror to shy persons to move.

Mrs. Mirand's, on the contrary, was the beau ideal of a successful London party. Already the pattern of the carpet was a

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mystery, already people were finding it difficult to ascend the staircase.

The initiated might wind in and out among the crowd, and so manœuvre across the rooms to speak to some favoured acquaintance, but to the majority of those present a friend in a further corner was as far distant and probably as little accessible as Africa and America.

Already a Babel of tongues greeted her ears; ladies were fanning themselves, gentlemen were uttering pretty nothings, as though the rooms were a wilderness and the fair addressed the only other inhabitant beside the speaker. Perfectly carried away by the intoxication of such a scene as she had never previously imagined, Honie forgot herself, forgot her dress, her trouble. For the nonce she was simply a spectator of a great and new play—just a looker on at some pageant, the beholder of a mighty show.

With her bouquet covering her satirical mouth, Miss Arguer was flippantly answering the trite compliments of some man about town—indeed, the compliments of many men about town—when chancing, perhaps through very weariness, to glance round suddenly, she found Honoria's eyes fixed upon her with an expression of such wrapt admiration as perforce made even such a *blasé* lady as herself smile genially.

In one glance she took in the girl's *tout ensemble*, her shabby dress, her cheap lace, her country air, which betokened her half a lady of some standing and whole a simpleton.

"Come," thought Miss Arguer, "this is something new and refreshing;" and she smiled again and moved six inches nearer "the creature" who wore a high dress and long sleeves, and who, as regarded all canons of fashion, might that day—that instant—have been turned out of the Ark.

"Well, and what do you think of it all?" asked Miss Arguer.

"Think of what?" inquired Honoria, and to Miss Arguer the tone of her voice was pleasant.

"Oh! what we were talking about, but perhaps you did not hear it."

"I did not. I was thinking—"

"Thinking—thinking here! And if not an impertinent question, about what were you thinking?"

"About you," answered Honoria, and she hung her head as a bashful lover might after a semi-declaration.

"About me, and to what purpose?" said Miss Arguer, really surprised.

"About your picture," said Honie boldly. "You did paint that 'Sowing and Reaping,' did you not? I do not go out much, but I went to see that. It made me sick. How could you do it! I think the contrast between the young fellow going out in the spring, accompanied by all his gay com-

panions to sow, and the same man 'old,' reaping, is awful."

"What struck you as the 'most awful' in the second panel?" asked the artist.

"His loneliness," was the answer, and there was an instant's pause; then—

"I fancy," said Miss Arguer, "it was a good idea; you cannot imagine how mothers cry when they see that picture."

"If I were a mother I should cry, though you might scoff at me for doing it," replied Honoria a little defiantly, for Miss Arguer's trade view of the position shocked her greatly.

Quite gaily, however, the artist patted her on the shoulder and said,

"Thank you, little one; you have paid me the best compliment I ever yet received. Let us be great friends. Will you sit to me. I want just such a face as yours. Let me paint your portrait."

Paint *my* portrait!" repeated Honoria, astonished.

"Yes, your portrait. It will put, to look at the affair from a pecuniary point of view, ever and ever so much in my pocket; won't you help me to make heaps of money. I do need it so badly."

"Of course," answered Honie; "if—if—I only can; but I think you must either be deceiving yourself or making fun of me."

"Neither, upon my honour," was the answer. "I see you as others will see you, not as you see yourself."

At that moment the lady who had talked\* about 'The Old, old Story,' driven that way by the pressure of an ever-advancing crowd, claimed Miss Arguer's attention.

"How do you do, dear?" she said. "Why, who would have thought of seeing you here?"

"Nobody, but I had a fancy to come. Is

not it sickening, wearisome, nothing to see, nothing to eat, drink, or hear. By the way, who was that partially-dressed creature I saw you talking to just now?"

"That over-dressed creature you mean, for at least she has a sufficiency of clothes which some of us have not. She has promised to sit to me. I wanted a subject, and her face suggested one. I mean to entitle the sketch 'Simplicity.' I shall seat her on a boulder in a mountain river, put a straw bonnet half off her head, clothe or unclothe her in a dress which exhibits more than half a white shoulder. As for the rest, she wears short petticoats, and is dabbling feet and hands in the pellucid water; my bother now is about her arms. Are they good or bad I wonder?"

"Sticks," pronounced Miss Rodwell.

"Well," said Miss Arguer tranquilly, "those items I can supply, but did you ever—ever—see a face so entirely sugges-

tive of a not foolish simplicity as that girl's ? ”

“ Who can have brought her ? ” said Miss Rodwell, “ and from what possible corner of the earth can she have come ? ”

“ Have not the faintest idea, and feel no curiosity on either subject. She has been brought, she is come. That is quite sufficient for me.”

Meanwhile, Honie, unconscious of Miss Arguer's artistic arrangements, was sitting on a rout seat, considering how beneficial a portrait of herself exhibited in the Royal Academy might prove to her songs.

“ It would make my name known,” she thought.

If you consider, my reader, she could have no idea that Miss Arguer regarded her simply as an abstract being, who would, with a tattered bonnet, bare feet, ragged gown, and arms furnished probably by some other model, supply an educated

public with a not entirely false representation of simplicity.

Though, indeed all types are somewhat apt to lead us astray. For instance, young as she still was, and inexperienced as she yet remained, she did not look one-half so innocent, demure, and saintlike as a lady dressed in a soft white material, who, at the moment of Miss Arguer's utterances, was drawing her skirts into narrow compass, and beckoning Mr. Lambe to come and occupy a portion of the tiny sofa on which she sat.

"I scarcely dared to hope," she began, looking up at him with eyes that had already done in a quiet way considerable execution.

"That you should meet the author of 'A Spitalfield's Weaver,'" Mr. Lambe finished. "But it is nice though, is it not to breathe the same air with so distinguished a person."

"I scarcely dared to hope that I should



meet you here," she amended. "A party is never a party to me, unless some one happens to be present with whom I can talk it all over."

"Which means, I trust, that you will come and dine with us quietly to-morrow."

"Can't—wish I could—am going in the afternoon to see a thieves' kitchen, and the evening I must spend in a penny lodging-house."

"Lord bless me!" ejaculated Mr. Lambe.

"You are glad you are not in my shoes," she suggested.

"Well, candidly, if I wore them—if they would fit my feet I should say—I do not think I should ask them to take me to either of the places you have named."

"We can argue and disagree, was not that our bargain?" she answered. "Now tell me what do you think of Mrs. Mirand's latest lion; what has the 'Spitalfield's Weaver' to say for himself?"

"A great deal, and he does not say it badly. His facts are not quite accurate perhaps; for instance, he imagines there are many Queen Anne's mansions bordering the Mile End Road, and that Forest Gate is a toll-bar, giving admission to one portion of Ye Greate Wode of Epping."

"Yet he must have been at some pains to get up his facts concerning Spitalfields and Bethnal Green," she remarked.

"Possibly, though I really should have imagined the 'Weaver' beyond his powers. However, to genius all things are possible."

"I shall go and talk to him presently," said the little lady.

"First, however, I want you to do me a favour."

"To hear is to obey, my lord. A hundred an' it only please you to name them."

"Did you notice the young lady who is of our party this evening?"

"Yes, I noticed her," answered Mrs. Sieveking, with a funny smile.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Mr. Lambe.

"I am not laughing. Who is she?"

"She is a writer of ballads."

"No, dear Mr. Lambe. No, don't say that. Don't ask me to believe it."

"And why should I not?"

"Because then I must believe music publishers to be even stonier hearted than other publishers. And that I cannot, cannot credit."

"Wherefore stonier hearted?"

"Look at her dress, dear friend, and then if a long acquaintance with the sins of your *confrères* have left any sense of shame in you, blush for the meanness of the creature who pays her for her ballads. But, perhaps," added Mrs. Sieveking archly, "they are very bad indeed."

"They are not," retorted Mr. Lambe hotly; "they are exquisite."

"Then why can she not dress herself like other people?"

Mr. Lambe uttered no word in reply. He only let his eyes wander at will over every detail of his companion's white llama, made close up to her throat, and falling in what its owner considered artistic drapery around her small light figure.

"Well, Mr. Lambe," drawing herself up irritably.

"Well, Mrs. Sieveking."

"You have not answered my question."

"Because I do not quite understand it. Is not Miss Legerton dressed like other people?"

"You dear, simple creature. She is quite out of the fashion. Her silk, originally worth about half-a-crown a yard, is shabby—so shabby that it looks *glazed*; her lace is Nottingham; her gloves a bad fit. She has had crape on her skirt; though carefully

ironed I could see the marks of the stitches."

"And I thought she looked so nice."

"She is not amiss. She has not bad hair if she knew how to arrange it. Her complexion is good, if somewhat too pale. Her features are not amiss. She might be passable, more than passable, in a pretty dress. Why did you not make her put one on?"

"In the first place, because that is the very best she has; in the second—"

"Well, in the second," suggested Mrs. Sieveking; "though it is superfluous, like the other twelve reasons given to Queen Elizabeth for not firing a salute."

"You will think me rude."

"No, I shall not; and besides, I like rudeness."

"I am not quite sure that I do," said Mr. Lambe, "and so we will rest content with reason number one."

Mrs. Sieveking fixed her eyes on him steadily, then she exclaimed,

"You wretch, I know what you were going to say, that you consider this Miss Leger—bah ! what is her name?—as well-dressed as I am !"

"I cannot deny the impeachment. Her dress may not be so expensive, but I confess, to my taste, it looks quite as nice."

"Hear, ye earth, and attend, ye heavens, and give ear, oh ! all ye women," cried the lady, with tragic earnestness ; "it is for creatures such as this, who have no taste, no discernment, no knowledge of fitness, that we tire our heads and buckle our shoes, and lace ourselves tight and get into debt, and sell ourselves body and soul to milliners and dressmakers and drapers, who first tempt us to buy what we do not want and afterwards send in unreasonable bills."

"Never mind, my dear," said Mr. Lambe, patting the speaker paternally on the

shoulder, "as many women will hate you to-night as despise Miss Legerton. Life is not all vanity and vexation!"

"And Miss Legerton?"

"Is young, friendless, clever, unworldly. Are these sufficient advantages to entitle her to one half minute's consideration from so fortunate a lady as yourself?"

"I do not know. I do not care for young misses, as you are aware; but still, for your sake, I may try to conquer my prejudices so far as your *protégée* is concerned. Tell me something about her antecedents, however. *Une carte du pays* is always of service."

A very few sentences sufficed to put Mrs. Sieveking in possession of Honoria's history.

She listened to it with a far-away expression in her beautiful eyes (perhaps she was looking in fancy at the "penny lodging-house"), and only when Mr. Lambe had quite

finished his parable did she open her mouth to speak. Then she asked,

"What is it you want me to do? Cultivate her? I really could not get up sufficient sentiment. Take lessons from her? I hate the sound and sight of music. If I were the Queen, or rather the High Court of Parliament, I would make the grinding of barrel-organs penal, and I would enact that no flute, harmonium, accordion, piano, or any other musical instrument whatsoever should be played upon except at certain appointed and licensed places. Further, no servant should be permitted to sing through her nose, or otherwise, any hymn tune, more particularly, 'We plough the fields and scatter;' and I would empower the police to arrest any lad, whether furnished with a basket or not, who went through the streets whistling."

"I do not think, except in the interests of my own trade, I should feel disposed to



oppose the passing of your somewhat comprehensive bill," answered Mr. Lambe; "but I suppose we may regard this as one of those occasions when music may be tolerated, and the service I desire at your hands is that you will tell Mrs. Mirand there is a lady possessed of a divine voice in the rooms, and beg her to entreat Miss Legerton to sing. Further, I want you to see that Miss Legerton does sing."

Mrs. Sieveking rose.

"For you, dear friend," she said, giving her artistic folds a little shake, and turning her head a trifle over her shoulder to consider the effect produced, "what would I not venture, do, or suffer? Only you must assure me, upon your word of honour, that the girl has a divine gift. You know it suits me to come here, and my only claim on Mrs. Mirand's kindness is that I have never yet made a mistake."

"You are quite certain it was not you

who introduced the author of 'The Spital-fields Weaver' to her notice," he asked.

"It is a practical joke I should have enjoyed playing, but my conscience acquits me of that sin. Now to revert to your swan."

"She can sing. I think even you will listen to her."

"In perfect faith I go then. When I am dead, and my epitaph comes to be written, do not forget that I once believed that I was once good-natured."

And so saying she glided away. To others it might be difficult, impossible in that house, to pass from one room to another—from one part of a room to a still remoter distance; but Mrs. Sieveking had but to lift her eyes and the men smiled and crushed themselves together; she had merely to say, "I am *so* sorry; thank you, so very much," and the women drew their skirts together, and made of their persons, small or large, as little as might be.

A friendly nod to one, a clasp of the hand to another; a "How are you, *dear*," to a third; and a "Come and lunch with me; send me a line that I may be at home," to a fourth. Thus the tiny lady effected her progress to the corner where Mrs. Mirand stood fanning herself.

"Dearest Mrs. Sieveking," said her hostess, "how I envy you! Icebergs could not suggest greater coolness."

"Large parties always make me feel chilly," answered Mr. Lambe's ambassadress. "What a gathering it is though!"

"And yet," whispered the hostess, "it strikes me it is not—it strikes me it is, just a trifle slow. There are plenty of people and talk, but there is no sensation, no movement, no curiosity."

"I can arouse that with your permission. In fact, it is to suggest a sensation I have toiled so painfully amongst all sorts and conditions of people. There is a girl

here all 'unbeknown,' who can sing like one of the angels from heaven. Nobody has heard of her. You are the *very first* to secure her. Shall I make her uplift her voice, shall I send every one away wondering at your unexampled penetration?"

"Shall you? my dear, dear friend, how can I ever sufficiently thank you for this about the thousandth obligation you have heaped upon me. Do you think I ought to ask her? Must I be near to enforce silence?"

"No. I will manage all that, only when I lift my finger say, 'Hush-sh-sh!'"

At that identical moment Honoria was timidly asking a lady arrayed like the Queen of Sheba,

"Has everybody here done something?"

"Everybody but you and me, my child," answered the other, glad, spite of her laces and diamonds and her large income well secured in the three per cents, to find any one to talk to.

Honoria's heart swelled.

"I *have* done something," she thought. "I *could* do something. This old lady has her jewels and her fine dress, but still if these people only heard me sing, they would think more of me than they do of her."

Gliding up to the remote couch Honoria and her companion occupied, came a lady, courteous, plausible, clever.

"So glad to see you again, Mrs. Kirton," she said, pressing her friend's be-ringed fingers. "I had *no* idea there was such a pleasure in store for me when I came here to-night. And *how* is your dear daughter? I saw the birth of a son and heir announced not very long ago."

"Thank you, *all* are well, and I am more happy than I can express. Mary writes to me she and the Marquis expect to be in England about the end of next month."

"And then you are going to the Castle, of course."

"Yes. I long to see Mary again," answered the old lady simply.

"Do you know it is by the merest chance I came over here at this moment," said that accomplished hypocrite, Mrs. Sieveking, addressing Miss Rodwell. "I had no idea of finding *you*. I undertook the perilous middle passage at Mrs. Mirand's entreaty to find this young lady," turning to Honoria; "you are Miss Legerton I think. I am Mrs. Sieveking; and Mrs. Mirand wishes to know if you feel yourself sufficiently in voice to sing something. She will be more obliged than I can express, should you be able to comply with her request."

"Before all these people?" said Honoria, timidly, yet with eagerness.

"Don't trouble yourself about the 'people,'" retorted Mrs. Sieveking, with a certain savage irony which would break loose in her speech at intervals. "Nine-

teen out of twenty will not know a song has been sung."

"So!" exclaimed the mother of the marchioness, turning with a pleasant smile towards her late questioner; "so it turns out you too can do something like every one else in the room save myself."

"You underrate your own abilities, dear Mrs. Kirton," said Mrs Sieveking drily. "Now, Miss Legerton, here just before us is the piano; thank you, Major, we want a little breathing space, please. Kindly ask every one to let my young friend have air enough to sing."

Talk of pianos! *What* piano ever equalled that over which Honoria now ran her fingers?

"Who is she? who is it? what is she?" was already being whispered audibly through the circles near at hand, when dexterously lifting her fan, Mrs. Sieveking, half-turning her head, raised as if quite by accident one finger.

Mrs. Mirand, said "Hush!" and the finger with its fellow-fingers seemed settling a refractory lock of Mrs. Sieveking's hair.

Uprose the voice, outswelled the notes; no need for any appeal for silence. No necessity for any order to "Hush." She simply sang, and men and woman stood mute to hear. When she finished, astonishment was so great that an utter stillness ensued.

"Go on. Sing something else," commanded Mrs. Sieveking, and once again the clear, full, young voice swelled through the room.

Mrs. Sieveking slipped back amongst the crowd, and the crowd pressed nearer and nearer to the singer and the piano.

Foremost amongst the crowd Miss Rodwell.

"Good Heavens," she said almost out loud, "who would have thought it! who *is* the girl, Mrs. Sieveking?"



"The composer of the 'Old, old Story.'"

"Absurd!"

"Pray accept your own version of the mystery then."

"But who is she, what is she?"

"She is of our sex, and she writes ballads and sings them. *Voilà tout!*"

"But *how* she sings! Listen."

"My dear, I don't want to listen any longer. It's all very nice I dare say; indeed am sure it is, but—"

\* "The fact is you are destitute of soul."

"*Sans doute*," and the speaker vanished as Honoria sang for the third time the refrain of her second song:

'Oh! for the dreams. Oh! for the hopes, Of the dear, dead long ago.'

"You like music," said Mrs. Sieveking, who, having at length succeeded in elbowing herself close to the popular author, spoke to him, as she was in the habit of speaking to all other people, without the slightest ceremony of introduction.

"Like it!" he answered with a surprised look. "I love it."

"How very remarkable! Now, I hate it."

And Mrs. Sieveking fanned herself equably.

"You astonish me!"

"How good it is to be able to astonish any one! Consider I have given even you a new sensation. Yes. I hate music as music. I am sufficiently up in the subject to know that girl has a gift; that indeed she sings wondrously well; but why should her 'Story,' old or new interest me? Why should I shed even one tear over the dreams or the hopes of her dear, dead long ago?"

"You are hard, I fear;" the man really did not know what else to say."

"As the nether millstone: where regulation music is concerned, I confess it has no charm to soothe my rugged breast. There

is only one thing I *love* ;” and Mrs. Sieveking shot a glance at her companion from behind her fan, “ I *adore* genius.”

“ But surely this young lady has genius ? ”

“ Of a sort, no doubt ; but what is her poor ‘ all ’ in comparison to, say, Miss Arguer’s picture or—may I not add—a novel such as yours ? ”

“ It requires some courage to dissent from such decided opinions,” answered Mr. Chervil with confusion ; “ but I must confess, so far as I am concerned, I would rather be able to compose a good song and sing it well than write like Dickens or paint like Millais.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because in that case I could see my fame—feel it—taste it. Observe the crowd round the piano ; remark how eager every one is to catch a glimpse of the fair young songstress.”

"If you had ever stooped from your high estate so far as to notice the crowd gathered round a pickpocket or a drunken woman in the street, you might have seen the same eager expression—intensified—on the face of every man, woman, and child composing it," said Mrs. Sieveking coolly.

"Did you ever stop to look at a street crowd?" asked Mr. Chervil, in surprise.

"Of course, I have. For what do you take me? A fashionable artist as is Miss Arguer; a rich old parvenu like Mrs. Kirton? (She looks as innocent as a kitten; but she secured a marquis for her second daughter, and a well-known City millionaire for her first born.) Do you suppose I spend my life in the saloons of fashion after the manner of Miss Rodwell, or that I have even sufficient social standing to command the attendance of such a *ménagerie* as Mrs. Mirand has secured to-night? No; it is as well to be frank. I am only a very insignificant

person, the wife of a captain in the merchant service. I live in the wilds of Islington; that once pleasant village to which consumptive patients used to be ordered, out of the then too populous City of London, and the only reason why I am here to-night, and have the honour of seeing genius disporting itself, is that dear Mrs. Mirand finds my undeservedly large circle of acquaintance sometimes useful even to her."

"But, surely," Mr. Chervil began, and then paused irresolute—

"But, surely," suggested Mrs. Sieveking, with an encouraging smile,

"I was going to say—pardon me if I seem impertinent, but I really cannot help it—surely you write?"

"Write!" she repeated, puckering her white forehead into funny little creases with a delightful semblance of non-comprehension, gradually clearing away into sun-

shine. "Write, of course I do *to my friends*. I will write to you if you like," and all the time she kept her fan busily at work, while her eyes raked Mr. Chervil's understanding fore and aft.

"Will you, oh! if only—"

"You must not put me in type, remember," she said solemnly.

"I wonder of what you think I am made," he exclaimed.

"Of all the component parts of a fool," thought Mrs. Sieveking; but she answered sweetly,

"Forgive me; but it must be *such* a temptation to reproduce the weak points of even your dearest friends if only you have genius to do it. And I have let you see some of my weak points, Mr. Chervil; so pray spare me."

"May I call upon you?" said the distinguished author, blinded with the glamour this woman knew so admirably how

to throw over the other sex as well as her own.

"*May* you, *will* you rather? Here is my card. I am always at home until five. But how are you to find your way to Islington? Oh! I forgot; all the unfashionable parts of London are as familiar to you as Africa to our friend the traveller yonder. Good-bye. I see Mrs. Mirand signalling for me. So happy we have met."

Finding himself left in a moment stranded, Mr. Chervil struggled towards the piano, where Miss Rodwell, surrounded by a group of old admirers, was singing very well indeed some songs by a German composer.

Round and about the distinguished author looked for Honoria, but he looked in vain.

After a little time, however, enlightenment came to him.

"Where on earth is that girl?" said Miss Arguer to Miss Rodwell. "I quite forgot to inquire where one could find her."

"Do not grieve too much," was the reply. "I have her address in my pocket."

"What on earth can you want with her address?"

"Perhaps you are not the only one on earth who may desire to make a study of 'Sweet Simplicity' at leisure," was Miss Rodwell's reply, as drawing her amber satin skirts around her, she put her hand on Mr. Mirand's arm, and so conducted went to struggle for a portion of Mrs. Mirand's excellent supper.




## CHAPTER IV.

### MISS RODWELL'S PROPOSITION.

"AND so Mrs. Caruth taught you," said Miss Rodwell as she sat in the shabby little drawing-room at Hackney, coquetting with a cup of tea.

Her hired brougham, which among people who knew no better might have passed muster for her own property; her hired horse adorned with a very tight bearing-rein, and her hired driver clad in a third-hand shabby livery coat, and conspicuous by reason of a broad band round his hat, all waited for the lady outside, to the admiration of opposite neigh-



bours to whom visitors even in cabs came rarely.

The driver had strict orders from Miss Rodwell not to attempt to get off his box, and expose the poverty of his trousers and the mended condition of his boots, and accordingly half an hour previously, Honoria's visitor had turned the handle of the brougham and stepped lightly on to the pavement.

Half an hour only previously ! and yet already she knew all she wanted to know of Honoria's past and present. In ten minutes she turned the girl inside out ; comprehended who she was, what she was, and how it came about that she had met her at Mrs. Mirand's, and now found her living all alone in the out-of-the-way suburb of Hackney.

" And so Mrs. Caruth taught you," she remarked, more by way of saying something than because she felt interested in the slightest degree by the fact.

"Yes, do you know her?"

"No; that is to say, I have been at her house, but I fancy I never really knew her. She used to send me cards, and I may have gone twice or so to her 'At Homes;' but I am quite sure I had no further acquaintance with her. The professor's set bored me to death, worthy people no doubt, but, *oh!* so slow, so horribly slow, fellows of all the Societies on the face of the earth; ladies as learned as the men, and as ugly as sin, hideously dressed and up in every dry science that no one wanted to hear anything about. At one time, I believe, Mrs. Caruth used to give pleasant parties, but that was before my visiting days, and before she and her husband separated."

"Separated!" repeated Honoria.

"Yes; did you never hear of that piece of stupid jealousy upon the part of old Caruth?"

"I always thought Mrs. Caruth was a widow."

"So she now is, happily for her ; but unhappily for her, she was first the professor's wife. I suppose she never cared for him in the slightest degree. All her proclivities, I believe, were for the stage. She was wonderfully clever, and I have heard, when young, extremely pretty. Her father was a man always out at elbows with fortune, who would have sacrificed every one belonging to him for a five-pound note. He had an iron will, and he made his daughter marry the learned Caruth.

"For the first few years after her marriage she took her own way pretty well, had her friends about her, gave delightful parties, and was greatly liked and admired. All at once old Caruth took it into his head his wife was indiscreet, a great quarrel ensued, and he sent her back to her father. Before three months were over he found he could

not live without her, and she returned to him a changed woman, quite low-spirited,—a patient Griselda, who fell into all the professor's ways and habits, entertained his fellow-professors, nursed the old gentleman when he was ill, and bore with all his pleasant tempers when he was well. When he died he left her two hundred a year to be forfeited if she married again. All the rest of his property he directed should be applied to founding a Caruth scholarship. After his death Mrs. Caruth went abroad—and disappeared. Fancy her turning up again in your most remote part of the world.”

“She is not there now,” explained Honoria; “she left her house just before we quitted Antlet; went abroad again.”

“It is a pity she does not come to London. No one ever believed her husband had the slightest ground for his suspicions.”

Honoria did not answer; but she thought

of many things that Miss Rodwell's narrative made tolerably clear. Perhaps the professor was not quite wrong after all.

"If I were you," said Miss Rodwell, changing the subject, "I should not sell that new song of yours at present?"

"I have sold it."

"To Mirands, of course, and for nothing, I dare say."

"Five guineas, and I was very glad to get the cheque."

"It is disgraceful," commented Miss Rodwell. "I call it nothing better than downright robbery. Five guineas, and they will make five hundred, or perhaps five thousand out of the transaction."

"I do not exactly see how they can do that," said Honoria.

"You will be wiser in a few years' time, and then you will wish you had kept your copyrights in your own hands."

"But what on earth could I make of copyrights if I did keep them?"

"Publish them yourself, or print them rather yourself, and sign every copy that crosses the publisher's counter?"

"I have no money to pay for printing."

"Do you make nothing by your teaching, then?"

"Very little; so little that I shall soon have to give up this house?"

"Nonsense!"

"Solemn truth," said Honoria.

"And what shall you do then? Go back to your friends?"

"I have none. Since Mrs. Caruth left Antlet and Mr. Lessant died, I think I may say, without exaggeration, I have not a friend in the world. Mr. and Mrs. Lambe are very kind, and so is Mr. Litchfold; but they cannot of course seem like old friends, or relatives."

"Who was Mr. Lessant?" asked Miss

Rodwell. "I knew some people of that name once. I used to meet them at Wimpledon. They lived at Dilfield?"

"We are talking of the same family," said Honoria. "Mrs. Lessant was a cousin of my mother, and I stayed for some time at Dilfield the summer before my father's death. She would not care much, I fancy, to have me claim relationship with her now. She never had any fancy for governesses and teachers."

"That I thoroughly believe," agreed Miss Rodwell. "She was as arrogant a person as I ever encountered. What a fall her pride must have had! I really wonder she remained at Dilfield."

"Why, what happened?" asked Honoria curiously.

"My dear, do you mean to say you do not know—that no one ever told you?"

"I never heard anything except that Mr. Lessant was dead. I wrote to him



when I was in great trouble myself, and Clara's husband, Mr. Fleming, answered the letter. He only said how sorry he was he could not come up to London as I asked, because Mr. Lessant had dropped down dead at the bank, and they were all in great trouble."

"Yes. No doubt. Her husband's death touched Mrs. Lessant in her tenderest point, money. So long as he lived he kept the ball moving, somehow; but the moment he died, the bubble burst. Virtually the bank had been insolvent for years. Mr. Lessant's domestic expenditure was, it appears, enormous. Young Carder was only taken into partnership to help in deferring the evil day. Mr. Fleming was also made partner, so that the real state of affairs might be kept quiet, and it was kept quiet till the master spirit collapsed. Then capital had to be introduced to save the whole thing from bankruptcy,

and there was in fact a dreadful reverse for every one. Miss Carder had to let Elmvale, and is living quite in retirement at Wimpledon, so that she may help her brother and his wife. There was some story about his wanting to cry off his engagement with the second Miss Lessant, but that he found he could not disentangle his affairs from those of the bank. They are all poor enough now. The Manor House is sold. Mr. Fleming lives at the bank, and Mrs. and Miss Lessant in lodgings at Wimpledon."

"Oh! I am sorry," exclaimed Honoria. "Poor Mr. Lessant, he was so kind, so good, so generous! I never fancied he was quite happy; but he always was thoughtful for others. The very day I left he put a parcel into my hand in the railway carriage, and told me not to open it till I got home, as it was merely a trifling present. I did not undo the fastening for several days, and

then, I found to my astonishment that the 'trifle' was this," and she touched her watch.

The expression Miss Rodwell's face wore as she looked at Honoria might have perplexed that young lady had her eyes not been blinded with tears—amusement, contempt, pity, satisfaction, all were blended for a moment in the curious glance with which the elder woman regarded her *protégée*.

"It will all come in the day's work," was Miss Rodwell's reflection, after she had wondered whether she could endure Honoria's evident turn for sentimental gratitude, and decided it was an evil she would have to bear for some time at all events.

"I thought Mr. Lessant fearfully vulgar," she remarked aloud; "but he was a kind, well-meaning man, worth a hundred thousand of his wife and daughters in my

opinion. If they are the only relations you possess, you are fortunate in being out of their jurisdiction. To know Mrs. Lessant is certainly not a 'liberal education;' on the contrary, I can imagine few things more narrowing to the intellect, more utterly stultifying than an intimate acquaintance with so prejudiced a woman."

There was something in Miss Rodwell's tone, as well as in her words, which jarred against Honoria's feelings.

"I never was very fond of Mrs. Lessant," she said coldly; "but I have eaten her bread and slept under her roof, and I should not like to say anything against her."

"Which means, I suppose, that you do not like to hear me say anything against her," translated Miss Rodwell, laughing. "No, don't look vexed, dear. I understand perfectly, and I admire your — what shall I call it?— chivalry, all the more because it is a virtue now somewhat out of date.

It is positively refreshing to meet with any one who has a good word for an absent friend or enemy. And so, you have really no person with whom you can take counsel concerning your future? ”

“ Except Mr. Litchfold.”

“ And Mr. Lambe, I presume.”

“ Mr. Lambe is very kind, but I do not know so much of him. Mr. Litchfold has been my friend ever since we came to London, and besides he is not acquainted with so many people. I mean he has more leisure than Mr. Lambe, and I can go and see him for half an hour without feeling that I am an intruder, and taking up valuable time.”

“ In fact, there is not a Mrs. Litchfold,” said Miss Rodwell.

“ Mrs. Lambe is as kind and nice as possible,” Honoria was beginning when Miss Rodwell stopped her.

“ That goes without saying all men’s

wives are kind and nice, so are men's mothers and sisters, and aunts and daughters, but the men who have not wives or mothers, or sisters or daughters or aunts, generally prove to be much kinder and nicer than those who are under female influences. I do not know why this should be the case; but it is the case. Now, what does Mr. Litchfold, unencumbered with a Mrs Litchfold, think of your position?"

"He thinks I have lost all my chances."

"And probably that you ought to marry."

"He will have to find some one for me to marry, then."

"Do you mean literally?"

"Literally; the Monument is about as likely to marry as I am."

"Clearly, then, you ought to try to get on in your profession."

"I wish I knew how to set about it."

"I fancy I can put you in the way of establishing a connection, but I must think the position over. Are you likely to have a disengaged evening during the course of the next fortnight?"

Honoria laughed outright, a mirthless, bitter laugh, which had taken the place of the glad merriment which once upon a time rang through the cottage perched high above the sea.

"I am always disengaged," she said. "Since I came to London I have only been at a party once, and that was when I met you."

"And a very pleasant meeting it was for me, I can assure you," remarked Miss Rodwell heartily. "Well, will you dine with me this day week, and manage to bring your friend Mr. Litchfold with you? I will send him a proper little note, but I depend upon you to do the persuading part of the business. There won't be another

creature present, and you can come in your morning dress, or dressing-wrapper for that matter if you like, so long as you come. I want to talk business with you. I want to see a little colour in your cheeks, and a little brightness in your eyes. Good-bye for the present. I cannot tell you what happiness your singing has given me."

"But you sing beautifully yourself," said Honoriá.

"I thought I did fairly well until I heard you. My dear, you do not yet understand what a gift has been given to you. If it were mine; but you know the old saying:

'If—ifs and ands  
Were pots and pans,  
What would tinkers do?'

Oh! do just let us try that duet we sang at Mrs. Mirand's once again. You are not tired, are you?"



"Tired!" repeated Honoria, as she opened the piano, and after a minute or so the two voices swelled out together, making such harmony that the fly-driver roused himself from semi-slumber, and passers-by paused involuntarily to listen.

"It is a treat to sing with you," said Honoria, her fingers still dreamingly straying over the notes. "I feel *en rapport* with you. To sing with a good *understanding* singer is like riding a spirited horse. I think if I had been a man I should have loved hunting."

"And I think being a woman you are a wonder," answered Miss Rodwell, with which pleasant flattery, that yet was not flattery, because the statement happened to be perfectly true, Honoria's visitor rustled away, leaving behind her a sense of power, competence, and excitement, strange to the heart of the woman who was a "wonder."

She was standing before the fire, her

head drooped, her hands idly clasped, a "dreamer in a dream," when Nannie, entering for the tea-tray, awoke her from her reverie.

"Eh! Miss Honie, but that is a great lady," remarked the servant.

"She is a very clever one," answered Honoria, with an intuition beyond her experience.

"And did not she seem happy here, Miss! I am sure had you been the Queen, she could not have made herself more at home."

Honoria smiled. "I fancy Nannie," she answered, "one of the penalties of being a queen is that she never can feel quite at home anywhere."

"Lor! Miss Honie, do you think so, that must be very bad."

"For the poor Queen, yes, indeed," said Honie dreamily.

You perceive, dear reader, that as yet the

girl's foot was not on the threshold of any society, and her ideas were consequently crude beyond belief.


"I am going to dine with her, Miss Rodwell, not the Queen, this day week," went on Honoria after a pause. "She thinks she can get me some pupils."

"God be praised, Miss Honie!"

"It would please you to see a joint in the house once again; would not it, Nannie?" observed the girl, laying her hand on the woman's arm.

Nannie took the hand, thin, slim, white, and holding in both of hers, kissed it before she answered, "It would please me to see any good come to your mother's child, Miss Honie, for her sake and yours."

After all it was a primitive household she had that day visited. So Miss Rodwell decided. Nevertheless, it suited her excellently well. Indeed, any thoughtful person cannot have failed to notice how admirably



households conducted upon primitive principles suit most people.

Possibly there is a liking for nature to be found running through each stratum of the world's social structure, and most certainly if Honoria lacked every other gift, she was natural.

"Inhumanly natural," said Miss Rodwell to herself, as she lay back in her brougham, hers to all intents and purposes for the time being, and pulled a rug over her knees, "but still I think a fool, a very clever fool though," she added, for Miss Rodwell was not a lady who ever blinded herself to facts.

"I must make quite sure of the Litchfold creature," she considered, after she reached home, pulling her devonport towards her, and taking out crested note paper and a crested envelope.

"True till death," was the lady's motto.

Heaven knows whence she eliminated

it, but many a social victory had been won by that legend done into Latin.

“ Dear Sir,”—

[This was what Miss Rodwell wrote to Mr. Litchfold.]

“ I am so wonderfully interested in the future of your young friend Miss Legerton, that I cannot hesitate to ask if you (her best adviser) will dine with me in her company next Wednesday at seven o'clock.

“ A plan has suggested itself to me, by which I think Miss Legerton's future may be secured, and I should like to talk those ideas over with her, and at the same time to have the advantage of your opinion. 4

“ Of course, ‘ ladies’ dinners ’ are proverbially bad, but I flatter myself I understand gentlemen's tastes, and think I can promise as good a meal as you would order for yourself at home.

“ And *really* I shall be so much obliged if

you will come. I long to make the acquaintance of the author of 'Boaz.'"

That last paragraph settled the business.-

In his wild youth Mr. Litchfold had been seized with the divine madness which impels men to strive for notoriety. He thought and he laboured. He read the book of 'Ruth' diligently, bought a second-hand copy of 'Josephus,' and worked his way conscientiously through the garrulous Jew's fanciful adaptation of the Scriptures. Instructed by a learned dean, he got his theological notions into such order that not Convocation itself could have found fault with his views concerning Naomi. He went abroad and imbued himself thoroughly with the mysticism of the German school of music. He wrote and he corrected, composed and destroyed, improved this air and altered that chorus, and at last, after seven years, was delivered of an oratorio which

fell as flat as if it had not been possessed of a single merit.

Perhaps, had he left well alone—let his airs stand as originally written, allowed his duets, trios, and choruses to remain as he jotted them first down on paper the thing might have had a chance of success.

As it unfortunately chanced, he improved and improved till not a scrap of natural vivacity remained in the whole composition. Scientifically it was correct to a fault. Not a critic could pick a hole in the harmonies, and no reviewer said he had annexed the ideas of other people to eke out his own.

Such as the oratorio was, he could honestly lay claim to the whole of it, but the whole thing was dull; nay, more, it was dead. He brought it out under the most favourable auspices, with the best singers, before an intelligent and cultivated audience, and yet the result proved a total failure.

Of the man's musical knowledge there

could be no doubt, but, unfortunately, concerning his genius there could be no doubt either.

He did not possess any. Himself excepted, not a creature left Exeter Hall after hearing 'Boaz' who believed that the mantle of any great composer had fallen upon James Litchfold.

*He*, however, knew all the beauties of that wonderful oratorio. *He* remembered how he had travailed with it and rejoiced. *He* had memories, touching and tender, connected with this air and that duet. *He* could recollect pacing his room, fancying how his choruses would astonish the critics accustomed to less conscientious styles of composition. All the merits of 'Boaz' were familiar to him as sharps and flats. If no one else properly appreciated the work, he could and did.

Of the trifles he turned out subsequently,



he took little account, save in so far as they helped to boil his humble pot.

'Boaz,' his 'Boaz,' was to him at once his Joseph and his Benjamin, his first-born and the child of his age, his mother, the wife of his bosom, and the infant upon whom he doted.

If no one else comprehended 'Boaz,' he did,—if no one else perceived the beauties of that marvellous work, he understood its perfections thoroughly.

To him 'Boaz' was what a pet child is to a fond mother, and the way to win his heart and blind his judgment was not to flatter him, but to praise his work.

Unaccustomed to other society than that of a friend or two in his own position of life and of his own turn of thought, he would have refused to accept Miss Rodwell's invitation had she failed to make that reference to his oratorio, which indeed might be taken as an illustration of her character.

Before she called upon Honoria, 'Boaz' had been to her as a dead letter. She knew, indeed, such a work was in existence, and that a person called Litchfold had composed it; the same Litchfold who "adapted" operatic airs for boarding-school misses, who wrote harmless songs that were approved and sung in thousands of virtuous households, who was an eminently clever organist, and who wrote a good deal for the musical journals; but that was the extent of her acquaintance with Mr. Litchfold's *chef d'œuvre*, until after her visit to Hackney, when she immediately set herself to master its intricacies.

Not an air in the oratorio but she had now at her fingers' ends. Not a point did she overlook. She could talk about 'Boaz' as if she had composed it herself.

She knew what all the critics had said concerning the work when first produced; who sang in it; nay, she had talked 'Boaz' over with one of the sopranos.

“Mein Gott ! but it vas heartbreaking,” said that artiste pathetically. “It vas as though one travelled by goods train. Ach ! never did I think ve should get to the end. Good ! of course it vas good ; he understands his art this Lick-field. How do you call him ? but it vas dry as bread a week from the oven. As a composition right and clever, no doubt ; but of life, none ; of passion, none ; of that vich carries away audience and singers, none—no, none.”

“I cannot think,” remarked Miss Rodwell, to Mr. Litchfold, trifling with some walnuts as she spoke, in continuation of a conversation which had begun over cabinet pudding, and was carried on through cheese and celery and dessert, “I cannot think that your oratorio ever had a chance. The singers were not English, and we all know what foreigners are. Give them the silliest flimsiest opera, and they can make something of that ; but let them have any work which it requires intellect to comprehend, and they are at sea !”

Mr. Litchfold bowed. It was after the dinner to which she had bidden him and Honoria that Miss Rodwell made the observation recorded. It is always pleasant to hear praise even by implication of oneself, and although Mr. Litchfold had not so high an opinion of the intelligence of English singers as his hostess professed, still the subtle flattery told.

Flattery always does tell. It is the only lie in the world which if repeated sufficiently often carries conviction with it.

"I always loved that song of the gleaners," said Miss Rodwell meditatively. "There is a joyous, clear sunshine about it which in anything but an oratorio must alone have ensured success; what do you think of it?" she asked, turning suddenly to Honoria.

"I never heard it," confessed the girl.

"Then, you have a treat to come. I should like," went on the lady, this time addressing

Mr. Litchfold, "to hear your oratorio performed by a strong company and in a good place. Say one of the cathedrals. In that case you would have the accessories, the mountings. And you ought to have English singers with some faint understanding of the story. If a foreigner ever read the book of 'Ruth,' which, indeed, is open to question, he or she would simply regard the narrative from a Parisian point of view; look upon Naomi as a clever and wily old lady, Ruth as a young person who played an extremely dangerous game for high stakes (which she won), and 'Boaz' as a man who was charmed by a pretty face and fooled by a couple of very astute females."

"No doubt," answered Mr. Litchfold, but even while he spoke, he found himself wondering whether Miss Rodwell were expressing her own opinions or those of the typical foreigner.

“Will you come upstairs when you feel inclined,” said Miss Rodwell, addressing Mr. Litchfold, rising as she spoke, and laying a friendly hand upon the sleeve of Honoria’s shabby black silk. She had achieved her purpose, she had impressed her visitors. She had provided a very good and quiet little dinner, a dinner to which a bishop might have sat down with a feeling of Christian satisfaction, and secured a butler (out of place) to wait at table, whose deportment would not have disgraced a bishop’s palace.

“Let us try one of the duets in Mr. Litchfold’s oratorio,” suggested Miss Rodwell to her new friend as they came near the grand piano. “This—I will be ‘Boaz’ and you ‘Ruth.’” So, to Mr. Litchfold, over his wine and walnuts, there descended the music of his own creation, carrying him back into the years gone by, when he hoped and believed he should be talked of as Litchfold the “great composer” instead of

"Litchfold, useful fellow you know, safe—reliable and thorough—makes no mistakes—and can turn out anything from a song for a Christmas annual to an exhaustive critique upon the respective merits of Beethoven, Mozart, and Handel."

"And now," said Miss Rodwell, half an hour afterwards, as the three sat in very easy chairs near the fire, "I want to tell you my plan. In the first place I have already the promise of six pupils, and am quite certain Miss Legerton can have six more at once if she chose to accept them. I have mentioned pretty high terms, because parents always think more of a lesson if they have to pay well for it. The difficulty, the only difficulty, in fact, is where these pupils are to be received. Clearly people who live at Kensington will not send their daughters to Hackney, and I could never advise any gentlewoman to go from Dan to Beersheba in all sorts of weather to

the injury of her health and the destruction of her dress. You think I am right in this, Mr. Litchfold?"

"I agree with every word you have spoken."

"Well, then, here is the situation. You," turning to Honoria, "would like to have a number of pupils whose parents move in good society, and can afford to pay what should ensure you a fair income."

"Indeed, I should," answered the girl, thinking of the shifts to which she and Nannie had been driven, of the difference between her shabby room and meagre fire, and the warmth and comfort and luxury of the apartment in which she at that moment sat.

"I do not think she could well live alone, could she Mr. Litchfold? She would be placed in quite a different position if once she became known to that she now occupies at Hackney, and I do not think, young as she is, it would be prudent."



"I am afraid it would not," said Mr. Litchfold.

"And that brings me to the part of my plan which I feel a little delicacy about unfolding. Suppose Miss Legerton and I set up-house together? She can have her part of it and I mine. I am weary of lodgings, even such lodgings as these, and I should agree to pay two hundred a year towards domestic expenses. Miss Legerton's charming old servant would make an admirable housekeeper."

"You are quite serious in making this proposition?" asked Mr. Litchfold, as Miss Rodwell paused for an instant. "You have given it due consideration, and think it would be a desirable arrangement for yourself?"

"I think so. I fancy Miss Legerton and I could get on very well, indeed, together; one thing we should not see too much of each other," she added with a smile. "Do

you feel disposed to advise her to accept my offer ? ”

“ Most certainly ; she may never have such an offer or such an opening again.”

“ And, remember, it is not for life,” suggested Miss Rodwell.

“ If it were I should decline the office of adviser,” said Mr. Litchfold, laughing. “ Come, Miss Legerton, what do you say ? ”

“ That I am amazed,” answered Miss Legerton. “ I feel very grateful, more grateful than I can express, and astonished ! ”

“ Why astonished ? ” asked Miss Rodwell.

“ That *you* should wish to live with *me*— I am so different in every respect,” and poor Honie’s eyes wandered round the room and rested on her own shabby dress, and then travelled towards Miss Rodwell, who, seated in a chair covered with crimson velvet, her silken skirts falling in rich folds

on the thick carpet, looked the very incarnation of plump prosperity—of a woman who ate daintily, and slept soundly; who had no need to take thought for the morrow, and to whom each day brought its full share of happiness, not anxiety.

Miss Rodwell, without answering by a word, rose and kissed the girl, whose genius had as yet brought so little to her either of money or fame.

“She will understand her own powers a little later, Mr. Litchfold; is it not so?” and Mr. Litchfold though only partly understanding what she meant, answered “Yes.”

Miss Rodwell had judged wisely when she took Honoria's friend into her counsel after dinner.

Mr. Litchfold accepted a good deal with unconditional faith that evening, which he felt somewhat inclined to mistrust the next day at twelve o'clock.

Indeed his doubts were so strong that,

after reconsidering the interview, he went off to Mirand's warehouse, where he found the principal of that establishment complaining bitterly of the work Mr. Lambe's absence entailed upon him.

"Where is he?" asked Mr. Litchfold. "I wanted to speak to him about a little matter of business."

"Keep it then like a good fellow till he comes back. He has been laid up with bronchitis and is off to Hastings. He would be very much surprised if *I* were to get bronchitis. Says he caught it at Mrs. Mirand's party."

"Awfully ungrateful of Mr. Lambe!"

"Yes, ain't it? will you have a glass of sherry. I can recommend this;" producing a decanter from a little cabinet at his elbow and pouring out a glass.

"Rather not, thank you," said Mr. Litchfold. "When will Lambe be back?"

“Have not an idea.”

At this moment a clerk came in with a pile of letters for signature. Having with an air of deep dejection, not to say resentment, discharged this duty, Mr. Mirand took another glass of sherry, lit a cigar, put his feet on a second chair, and prepared to gossip with Mr. Litchfold.

But that gentleman was in no mood to enjoy Mr. Mirand's conversation.

“I see you *are* very busy,” he said, taking his hat and stroking it meditatively, “I will look in another day when perhaps Lambe may be here.”

“All right,” agreed Mr. Mirand; “trust he will be here soon or I shall be knocked up and have to go to Hastings also.”

“You look as if business was killing you,” observed Mr. Litchfold, turning towards the door, then pausing he asked,

“Oh! by the bye, Mirand, *who* is Miss Rodwell?”

"Why, Miss Rodwell is Miss Rodwell, who else should she be?" and in his amazement at the question, Mr. Mirand took the cigar out of his mouth, and stared hard at Mr. Litchfold.

"But what is she?"

"A very charming woman—talks well—plays well—paints well—goes everywhere—knows everybody."

"Is she well off?"

"I suppose so. Are you thinking of marrying her?"

"No, I am not; but can you tell me nothing of her actual position, who her parents were, where she came from?"

"No, I can't," was the reply. "She was a schoolfellow—or playfellow of Mrs. Mirand's, and they have always been great friends,—though, mind you, it strikes me she gives us a cold shoulder; but Mrs. Mirand says I am wrong there. For my part I prefer little Mrs. Sieveking. She is

a clever creature if you like, and does not bore one so much about big people as Miss Rodwell."

"Then, Mrs. Mirand has known Miss Rodwell a long time?"

"All her life, I fancy, but how long a time that may be, I should not care to inquire or advise you to inquire either."



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE NEW HOUSE.

Miss Rodwell was not a lady who let grass grow beneath her feet. Fond of her ease though she might be, if she ever took a task in hand, she knew no real rest till it was accomplished.

If it were necessary for her to rise early, she never lay a-bed; if a letter had to be answered she answered it, let her eyes be as heavy and her hand as weary as they well could. Very early in her social experience she had discovered why so many people fail socially; why those who, up to a




certain point, make very fair sailing, suddenly, or by degrees, disappear from sight.

How many scores—nay, rather how many hundreds—had she not met who, starting with every promise of success, might a few years after have been dead and buried so far as their old acquaintances remembered or their old haunts knew them?

According to their own accounts they had been ill, busy, perplexed, harassed, unfortunate, poor, slighted, or forgotten. Something outside themselves, something the coming of which they could neither have foreseen nor averted, had hindered, prevented, or crippled them. A relation had died, or a bank failed, or a broker levanted, or a patron been induced to listen to some slander.

Miss Rodwell gave ear to all those utterances, and was ready enough to sympathize with the great rank and file of non-successful men and women with whom she so often




came in contact ; but she knew, though the results they stated might be correct, the reasons they conceived had conduced—indeed ensured those results—were wrong.

They had “no stay ;” they went off with a great deal of spirit ; they ran as long as they could, and then fell out lame, beaten, disgusted.


When they found Society had no “winning-post,” no goal of rest ; that the heat did not mean a couple of miles, or a couple of years, or anything short of life itself, minds and bodies of a particular order, or, to speak perhaps more correctly, of a general order, tired of the business,—sickened of the treadmill which never permitted a pause, of the constant “call before the curtain,” which required that even if a sufferer were stretched on a sick bed, he should be “doing” if unable to be up.

“No,” thought Miss Rodwell ; “it is not the pace, but the distance which kills. I

understand it all now well enough. It is not given to every one to stand on guard for ever. If the spirit be willing, the flesh is weak ; if the flesh be strong, the mind is sensitive, or foolish, or romantic. Pah ! and who *would* do it ; who, even if he could, supposing a choice remained ? There are hours when the merchant can lay aside his ledgers ; the handmaiden is not always answering to the eye of her mistress ; even cab-horses have, I suppose, an off-day now and then ; but I, now, for instance, what rest have I ? If I take the wings of the morning and flee to the uttermost part of the earth, I must either renounce Society for ever or carry it about on my back with me ; write to dear Lady Small Talk an account of the Mesopotamian fashions, correspond about the state of the Sandwich Islanders' souls with Dean Conversion's wife, and tell Professor Topsy Turvy he is right, and that the Scriptures are uninspired because a



method has been discovered of changing the Ethiop's skin without the slightest difficulty. Pah! if I could afford to let these people go adrift, if I might refuse their dinners and their teas and their suppers; their garden parties, their water parties, and their hateful picnics, I would do nothing for the remainder of my life. I would sleep and grow fat. I would eat, drink, and be merry. I would travel among nations who never heard of the Duchess of Darlingford, and who do not care whether Sir Levi Houndsditch ever came into existence. I would try to get up a taste for nature. If only for a day I should like to feel myself out of the running, to lose the memory of crowded rooms, to get rid of the sight of note-paper, to be out of the sound of the postman's knock, to be able to say 'Not at home,' one hour, without the certainty of being compelled to say 'At home,' the next.




“And yet there are idiots who think I like it all ; idiots who, I suppose, imagine horses like walking round and round in a mill, or donkeys like dragging a costermonger's barrow. But still, if one starts in life with the conviction that a certain number of good things are necessary for happiness, what is one to do ? why, what ? ‘Why, do as you have done, Miss Rodwell,’ I seem to hear a cheerful cynic remark ; ‘sell yourself to the world and get a good round sum for the purchase-money.’

“And have I done this ? Well, yes, as times go perhaps I have, and yet what an ungrateful world it is ! How strictly it adheres to its unspoken bargains—its unwritten contracts. With what sweet falsehood it doles out wages it expects to be fully earned, and then how politely, but how surely, it rids itself of the labourer no longer worthy of hire ! Ah ! my cynic, you are right. If we do not make hay

while the sun shines we shall have but little fodder for winter; for the old horse, the knacker, or a worse fate, the knacker's yard; for the worn-out labourer, the union; and so 'on with every class of worker in the community,—unless it may be parsons and privileged young simpletons, or old fogies who can claim pensions," she went on; "and they, even they, drop out—that is it, we all drop out sooner or later—unless Mammon rides the social steed, and money digs its spurs into the ribs of even the poorest animal imbecility itself ever bestrode."

If a woman can be an utter radical, Miss Rodwell had long recognised herself as that anomaly. Nay, she was more—a Chartist, a Communist, a Fenian! everything which opposed itself to human experience and human laws, which desired to re-create the world, and start afresh on quite new and



untried principles approved itself to Miss Rodwell.


She despised the man who was rich, because his grandfather and great-grandfather, and other relations before them, had added acre to acre, and house to house. She hated the man who, having had no father or grandfather worth mentioning, set to work and built his own house, and planted his own trees, and bought his own acres for himself. For her youth and beauty had lost its charm, because youth and beauty so far as she was concerned were past and done with.

Goodness she deemed insipid, not without reason perhaps, considering the unpromising forms in which it had been presented to her. Religion she regarded as sometimes twaddle, sometimes humbug, sometimes both. If she really cared for anything it was for genius; not for the genius who could preach a good sermon,

sing like Grisi, act like Rachael, or paint like Titian, but for the genius which gibes and bites, which never takes up its pen except to stab, nor opens its mouth save to sneer.

To Miss Rodwell the talk of such men and women ; the cutting ridicule of those who piqued themselves on birth, or riches ; the valour of an ancestor, or the personal industry which had achieved success, was as water in the desert—as summer after winter.

Hers was the task night after night, and year after year, to endure the monotony of rank and riches—to affect the tone of a society which wearied her to death ; and the only real rest she ever knew, the only occasion on which her fainting spirits revived naturally, and which made her seem to herself a giant refreshed, were those when everything she ordinarily heard upheld as good was scoffed at as absurd ; when the





ancestors of my lord and the thousands of the youngest knight furnished alike themes for merriment.

Wealth and rank are still, even amongst the gibbers, considered prizes worth gaining, material advantages worth having; but all honour and admiration for the usual possessors of money-bags and titles went quite out of fashion in literary circles, when it became happily no longer necessary to approach a patron with fulsome adulation in order to make sure of daily bread.

"Times are changed," Miss Rodwell would consider a little enviously, as she laid her head on her pillow after one of the unceremonious parties so infinitely to her liking. "In former days wits and philosophers had to say pleasant things to idiots; in these, women like myself, have to amuse them—amuse them! absurd—one could not, even if one were *wicked*."

To a woman, such as has been indicated,

the details of finding a house, furnishing it, touting for pupils, and ordering a sufficient wardrobe for Honoria came all in the way of a not unpleasant day's work.

Before she unfolded her plan to Mr. Litchfold, she had set her eyes on a house—the house—centrally situated as regarded Honoria's engagements, near a fairly fashionable neighbourhood; *semi-detached*—well-nigh detached by a fortunate arrangement of halls and staircases, and the day but one after the little dinner she drove over to Hackney and took Honoria to view it.

“Could anything be more perfect?” she asked. “Here is space for a stand filled with flowers. You love flowers? Ah! I thought so. The ground floor shall be mine, and yours as well if you ever want it; then we go upstairs—see, is not this charming? We fill this little room on the first landing with flowers, statuettes, china, and make it simply lovely! And now the

drawing-rooms. Till you can afford better you shall have my furniture and my piano ; yours we had better sell. At once we divide the bedrooms, or rather attics. Are you satisfied ? Do you like it, dear ? ”

“ Like it ? ” repeated Honoria. “ It is all as in a fairy tale—only it comes too late.”

Very discreetly Miss Rodwell ignored Honoria's final utterance, and continued,

“ In a house like this, you ought, with your talent, to be able to do just what you like—dictate your own terms and your own hours. Leave me to settle all about money and time and dinners, and all the rest of the routine work. If you will only attend to the teaching, Nannie and I will see to the tradesmen, and arrange the visiting ; for you must visit, remember that.”

“ But my dress,” suggested Honoria.

Miss Rodwell took her by the shoulders and turned her right round.

“Did it ever occur to you, young lady,” she observed, “that when I proposed setting your house in order, I intended at the same time to superintend your wardrobe? You are not dressed now, you are only clothed, and that in a semi-sufficient fashion. You want to make money—and you shall, but to do it you must not come out in the character of a destitute orphan. You shall wear black as long as you like, but it must be rich black, thick silks, flowing grenadines relieved by the best lace. Now do please leave all the details of this enterprise to me, and go home and talk matters over with that dear old Nannie, whom I love and respect as I have never yet loved and respected a countess.”

Before another week had passed over her head, Honoria, looking in the glass, scarcely recognised herself, whilst Nannie, in a state of rapturous delight, clasped her hands and laughed and cried alternately.

"Oh! my dear, my dear!" she exclaimed, "if the poor mistress could but see you now!"

Honie did not answer; she only turned from the glass tearless, as of late had been her habit, but feeling that under all her finery there lay the same load of sorrow, throbbed the same heavy heart.

"I shall never be happy again," she said once to Miss Rodwell, who met this statement with the practical answer.

"Well, you must try to be as little unhappy as possible; mourning for your mother will not bring her back to life, and you ought not to be so selfish as to wish it could. While we are here, it is essential we should make the best we can of existence. I am sure I feel it worth all the trouble I have taken only to see the ecstasy of your old servant. No girl in her teens was ever half so proud of, and delighted with, a dress as Nannie, when she appears

in that old black satin I gave her. All she regrets is that the 'Antlet folk' cannot see her."

"‘They would never believe it was me, miss,’" she said the other day. "I wonder what she will think when she sees this house."

"She will be like the 'Antlet folk' never believe she and I are going to live in it!"

Honoraria was right. For days after Nannie was installed in her new abode, she went about like one in a dream. In the mornings while she busied herself with her kitchen-work, she behaved rationally enough, but in the afternoon, when she was free and able, as she remarked, to dress herself and look like a lady, it was no unusual thing to meet her walking out of one of the rooms exclaiming *sotto voce*, "I never did; no, I never did."

When to the flowers and the lovely

carpets and the beautiful furniture was added the further ornament of a boy in buttons, Nannie's, or as Miss Rodwell insisted on calling her, Mrs. Tillzer's delight and vanity knew no bounds. She felt assured the lad was a "limb," and would prove a thorn in her flesh, which indeed he did; but as we know pride feels no pain, so Nannie was willing to condone every sin of her new vassal, in consideration of the glory of knowing that Miss Honie had, at last, something which she dignified by the name of a servant in livery.

"Welcome home!" said Miss Rodwell to Honoria on the evening when she came to take up her abode at 'The Ferns,' as the new residence was called. "Welcome home! I trust you will be prosperous, well, and happy here, and that every memory you may hereafter have of it will be pleasant."

And then they had tea in the drawing-

room; and with a sense of wonder and incredulity Honoria, surveying the magnificence which surrounded her, tried to realize that she, Honie — she poor, portionless Honoria Legerton—was mistress of such a house.



## CHAPTER VI.

MADAME FELICIA.

"No, you will never make a real success with your songs until you can get them taken up by some professional. It is all very well for Mirand to say they do not sell; Mirand does not want them to sell. If you were to die to-night, he would have advertisements of the copyrights he holds in every paper to-morrow morning, but he is not going to push your songs in order that you may utilise his exertions. Do you suppose I have lived all these years and failed to comprehend the ins and outs of gentlemen like Auguste Mirand. Kind ! for

Heaven's sake do not talk such rubbish to me. Kind ! would he have *given* you five guineas ? No, you know he would not, or five shillings either for that matter. When you have seen as much of the world as I have, you will know that people never do anything for you unless they expect a *quid pro quo*.

"You are the contradiction of your own doctrine," said Honoria, laughing.

Miss Rodwell coloured—cheeks and brow and even throat suddenly crimsoned—and for a moment she seemed disconcerted, then she answered,

"Perhaps I am the exception which proves the rule, but whether I am or not, believe me that in this world the most costly luxury in which one can indulge is faith."

It was in the Easter holidays this talk took place, in bright cheerful Easter weather. Miss Rodwell sat at her devonport, and

before her was an ever-increasing and already goodly pile of letters for post. For a few minutes she had laid aside her pen and, with hands folded on her blotting-pad, turned her once handsome and still attractive face towards her companion, who, leaning back in an easy-chair, with arms crossed behind her and eyes upturned to the ceiling, looked as little energetic as a woman who ordinarily worked hard to earn her bread could possibly be supposed to do.

"Illusions are very pleasant, however," she remarked in reply to Miss Rodwell's observation.

"Yes, but they are expensive."

"To come back to our sheep. How is one to find the singer who shall make the songs? As you are aware, they have been sung in public already, but they certainly have not been made."

"We have not yet got the right person.

Broadly we may say your ballads do not commend themselves to the majority of professional singers. It always saves trouble if one begins to build on perfectly solid ground, and I suppose it is no news to you to hear the British artist as a rule considers your songs a mistake."

"Pray proceed with the edifice," said Honoria, "the building can now go on apace."

"What a creature you are!" exclaimed Miss Rodwell; "I do not really believe you care whether your songs sell or not."

"*There* you are mistaken. I care a vast deal more than I could ever hope to express. If—if—if—but proceed. You have a plan on hand I feel persuaded."

"I have; *the* woman who can sing you into fame is in England; the question is, will she be so obliging?"

"That question I am able to answer. She will not."

"Don't be absurd," expostulated Miss Rodwell. "I have every reason to suppose she will be only too delighted to take up something which every one else rejects."

"Complimentary to me," said Honoria, in a stage aside.

"Madame Felicia has her little crotchets, and one of them is or *was* a fancy to be peculiar and 'contrary,' as I think nurses phrase it. Madame always was 'contrary.' All her life poor madame had a hankering for respectability, and—well, she made the customary mistakes. What those mistakes were, it is not necessary to talk about. I need only remark, madame found it expedient to leave London and seek her living in places on the verge of civilisation. She seems *not* to have had a very good living, for she is back again, and poor. Now would be your opportunity. If you can secure her, interest her—she will make your songs known wherever she is heard. For she can

sing, at least she could. In her own particular line she had no rival. You ought to see her and that this afternoon."

"Oh! dear," sighed Honoria; "won't you let me have one hour's rest?"

"You can rest for the remaining hours of your life so far as I am concerned, if you only make up your mind to do without food, clothing, or shelter," said Miss Rodwell a little contemptuously.

Honoria changed her attitude into one of strict attention, and looked at her companion with some amazement.

"Must one starve," she asked, "because one asks for a single day's cessation from work. When have I any rest? What with teaching and visiting, visiting and teaching, I never have a minute to myself except the few hours I spend each night in bed. Do you think I am unreasonable because I want to spend this whole day in utter idleness?"

"Yes, I do," was the reply. "In your position and in your profession, you ought always to be either fishing or mending your net. Not for a single instant ought you to allow your eyes to be diverted from the great secret of all success—notoriety. How have you made your connection? By your talents? Not a bit of it; but by being seen here, there, everywhere—by having Miss Legerton the sweet singer of Society identified with Miss Legerton the teacher. 'Young certainly, but so wonderfully clever.' How long have you been living here?"

"More than a year."

"And you like the life? Honestly now!"

"Yes," Honoria answered; "I like the life. It is a much more prosperous life than I had any right to expect I should ever enjoy."

"There are bricks to make in this land

of Egypt," went on Miss Rodwell. "But it is a pleasant and a goodly land withal ; full of leeks and cucumbers, flesh-pots and the material advantages no one but a simpleton would ever affect to despise. Therefore be wise, young lady ; do not let even a chance come in your way without trying to grasp it. Now is your time for opportunities. There may arrive a day when even if you go out to seek them, they will not answer to your call."

Honoria got up from her chair, and, with a pretence of yawning, asked,

"Where then is this Madame Felicia to be found ? Tell me, and I go on the instant."

"Here is her address," answered Miss Rodwell promptly ; "procured with difficulty, confided to me under all sorts of conditions of secrecy. You little wretch, you did not imagine I knew all the time where to send you. With less trouble I



fancy I could command an army than induce you to look after your own interests."

"I wish I had your energy," said Honoria, quite truthfully, as she left the room.

"And I wish I had your youth and your voice and my own nature, and I would not thank the Queen to be my godmother," capped Miss Rodwell.

Ten minutes later, Honoria, looking very fresh and pretty in her walking-dress, opened the door.

"I am going, really," she said. "Give me my final instructions; tell me what I am to say, the terms I must propose, and I will do my best to reflect credit on this establishment."

"Look as you do now, talk as you talk now, tell madame all about yourself, ask her to consider what terms would suit her purpose, and the victory is won. Are

you not going to drive? Let Robert call a cab."

"I mean to have my holiday, and still do your gracious bidding," was the reply. "I shall walk. Heaven knows that is a luxury in which I am seldom able to indulge."

"Well, my dear, so long as you go, it matters very little in this case how you go. You will be back for dinner, I suppose."

"So I suppose, unless madame conceives such an affection for me at first sight as shall render parting painful, if not impossible."

"Be sure you tell her how few singers can render your songs properly."

"You may be quite sure I shall not tell her all singers hate my songs." With which final utterance Honoria, in her new spring-bonnet, in her fresh spring dress, tripped down the staircase and out into the street, where already itinerant vendors of

Flora's treasures were pushing flower-laden barrows before them, and shouting "All-a-blowin', all-a-growin'."

To some hearts spring—mere spring—the rising of the sap—the flickering sunshine, the fluctuating sapphire of the skies—the spring flowers—the budding green leaves—brings a perhaps unreasoning sense of pleasure. To Honoria the especial spring of which I write seemed more beautiful than any of its predecessors. Over every grave there grows, sooner or later, greenery, and at last the bare mound that covered all the earthly remains of the mother who loved her darling so exceedingly well was clothed with verdure.

Mrs. Legerton was not forgotten. So long as her daughter breathed, that could never be; but the sorrow was less keen, the agony less sharp.

Now, when Honoria returned from some great party where she had been praised,

admired, made much of, she was able to say to Nannie without tears, "Oh! it was all so beautiful. If I could only tell mamma about it."

Later on, in the days that found Honoria quite reconciled, she thanked God in her heart, if not with her lips, that it had never been possible for her to tell her mother anything.

Thus, though the scar remained, the wound had healed, if recently. In the months succeeding her mother's death, when she was quite alone as regarded human help, Honoria had gone through such physical deprivations, as well as mental agony, that it would only have seemed natural if her sorrow had worn itself out in the struggle with actual poverty. But the girl's grain was finer than this. A coarser temperament might have felt its own bodily suffering so much that, when comforts and luxury came, it would have basked in the sunshine of prosperity upon the moment, and forgotten its other woes as a cat forgets her

sorrows when stretched before a fire. Upon this, to a certain extent, Miss Rodwell had built, and unduly, for it was the sensuous and not the sensual luxury of her new life that had charms for Honoria.

The artistic temperament must always and of necessity be susceptible to external influences, else the temperament could not be artistic. Flowers, music, pictures, beauty, these things always must appeal to everything in a human being which admires the loveliness and the gracefulness of the Good God's gifts to his creatures.

I do not say there is anything high or spiritual in such appreciation, but to some natures, especially in early youth when imagination is very apt to be confounded with veneration, the mere delight of living amongst surroundings grateful to the senses often is mistaken for a hymn of thanksgiving.

Take you the chestnut-tree when it is in

full leaf and in full flower. If you who read can only feel the beauty of that tree quiver through you, and stir all your pulses with a joy and pleasure to which you can give no name and perhaps no expression, be sure you have the artistic temperament—the temperament which finds beauty as it walks abroad, in the budding hedgerows and the rippling stream, in the peeping crocuses and the tender primrose, which is sad only when nature is sad too, when all her treasures, like so many of ours, alas! are hidden away under the apparently dead and deathly earth upon which gloomy skies look down with a sickening similitude of human sympathy.

It was thus, at all events, with Honoria. For the bodily comforts her changed circumstances provided, she cared as little as can well be imagined; nay, there were times when her heart almost loathed the sight of well-served meals, remembering on

what frugal fare the mother she loved had supported existence; but the beauty in which her new surroundings seemed steeped, the grace of the life she now beheld, the luxury, the refinement—all appealed to that weaker part of her nature which she inherited from her father, since, to her mother, unless something else of far higher importance had gone hand in hand with them, grace and luxury and refinement would have appealed in vain.

But this story has to deal with Honoria, not with the gentle lady who could never have gone out into the world and grown to love it as her daughter did far and away too well; and so we come back to London streets, with the spring sunshine brightening them, and Honoria, walking swiftly along, mentally humming as she went the song she hoped Madame Felicia would “take up.”

Before she had proceeded a hundred yards she met a gentleman she knew.

"What, Miss Legerton!" he exclaimed, "is it possible you are going out pleasure-making this Easter time like all the rest of the world?"

"I am very thankful indeed to say I am not," Honoria answered. "I am going out on business."

"And since when have you conceived such a distaste for pleasure?"

"Since I have found it to be a toil. I do not affect to feel a delight in teaching, but I would rather teach all day than be compelled to go out evening after evening tired or ill or out of sorts."

"Tired you may be sometimes, but I do not fancy you are ever ill or out of sorts," said Honoria's acquaintance, gallantly implying a compliment.

"I am ungrateful enough occasionally to wish I could be ill," was her reply; "for I do get horribly weary of seeing people,



new, yet still the same, week after week and month after month."

"No doubt you prefer the little parties given at 'The Ferns,' or the houses to which Miss Rodwell and you go on the rare occasions when you are 'off duty.'"

"Indeed I do," said Honoria, smiling; "that kind of visiting is pleasant. The great gatherings are too grand, too formal, too—"

"Proper," suggested Mr. Archer. If he had struck her, Honoria could not have reddened more suddenly or vividly.

"I do not think anything can be too proper," she answered quickly.

"In the abstract perhaps not," was the reply; "but practically we find, as a rule, that propriety is somewhat apt to be stupid."

"I think I must say good morning," observed Honoria, giving him her hand,

not very cordially, yet with a constrained civility.

“ I shall see you again this evening. You remember we were to try that quartette with your young friend the Signor. What is his name ? ”

“ Gonfroni. Yes, I remember, but I hoped every one else had forgotten.”

“ Miss Legerton ? ”

“ Am I not rude ? but indeed—indeed I feel in want of a complete holiday.”

“ Shall I postpone my visit, then ? ”

“ If Signor Gonfroni comes, what would that avail ? Really, however I must bid you good-bye ; ” and this time Honoria, without any further ceremony of farewell, simply bowed and hurried on her way.

Mr. Archer stood still for a moment, looking after the swiftly-receding figure.

“ I wonder now,” he thought, and the same wondering thought had perplexed him

before, "whether she is rogue or dupe—accomplice or simpleton. If she be the former, why does she not play into the Rodwell's hands? If she be the latter, what can be the astute Rodwell's game?"

And so cogitating he pursued his way, and Honoria hers till she met with another gentleman, who greeted her in tones of subdued disappointment.

"To-day, Miss Legerton, I *did* hope to find you at home."

Honoria looked up at him, and placed her hand quite confidently in his.

There was strength in his figure, his face, his voice. She had not known him long, but already she trusted him implicitly. She felt if any great trouble overtook her, she could consult him as though he were her brother. Miss Rodwell was always impressing her with the necessity of cultivating Mr. Archer, who knew prima donnas, the newest tenor, the future bass,

and the present contralto, in whom every publisher believed, and who could persuade the critics to his opinions; but, in spite of all sage counsel, Honoria liked much better the square-built, honest, country gentleman, who "did hope to have found her at home."

"You would have found me at home, Mr. Daymes," she answered, "had not Miss Rodwell seen fit to order me out. She advises me to see a singer who can make my songs, and I do so wish to have them made."

"Do you?" he said; "and why?"

"Why!" she repeated; "can you not imagine?"

"I fear I cannot exactly," he answered.

"Well," explained Honoria, "I am told—only told, remember—there are authors who can earn from three hundred to three thousand a year. Now, if I could only earn three hundred, I would forswear teaching and visiting for ever."

"The teaching, perhaps, Miss Legerton," he said, "but surely not the visiting? It is only men who fail to find pleasure in evening parties."

"There was a time when I loved them," she answered; "but since last Christmas I have been getting more tired of them every day, or rather every night. Of course, there are houses and houses, and if one need only go where one liked—"

"Let me hope that my cousin's is a house you like. She has sent me up as her ambassador to pray and beseech Miss Rodwell to recall her refusal for to-morrow evening."

"I did not know Mrs. Tyndale had asked us," remarked Honoria. "Miss Rodwell manages all our correspondence. I hate letter writing as much as I do visiting. So far as I am concerned, I would much rather go to your cousin's than to the affair to which we are bidden. It is at old Lady

Comford's. She is a marchioness, is she not? I know she is detestable, and every one there will be on his p's and q's, and far too stately to talk like anybody else. You can tell Miss Rodwell *I* should like to throw her ladyship over, but it will be of no use, Mr. Daymes—not of the slightest use. Miss Rodwell thinks there is no one on earth like Lady Comford; and as Miss Rodwell has been the best friend I ever had, I try to do what she tells me. If we had only met each other while my mother was alive—”

And Honie paused; and the light and sunshine died out of her face, and her companion saw for a moment the better Honie that some moral chemistry revealed occasionally to him and to one other—a young, poor, struggling, good-looking, honest man Honoria had helped, and delighted to help, up the first steepness of the path to Fame.

Nevertheless, Honie, though you paused and looked mournful while you thought of what might have been had you met Miss Rodwell during your mother's lifetime, you would never in that event have gone visiting with that lady, as you did.

After all, if Mrs. Legerton had no genius she possessed common sense, and she would never have believed that a clever woman of the world could have been seized all in a moment with a devouring passion, even for her darling.

Those who sit in the chimney corner, and watch the game of existence, know far more about its ins and outs than the actual players. When all was said and done, though Mrs. Legerton could never have fought the world as her daughter did, she was not so great a simpleton by many degrees.

"I shall do my best to shake Miss Rodwell's faith in the utter perfection of

Lady Comfort," said Mr. Daymes, confidently, but Honoria shook her head.

"Your best may be admirable, but you will find it unavailing all the same."

With which cheerful assurance, Honoria gave him a cordial good-bye, and went on her way, leaving him to wonder how on earth two ladies, one a teacher, certainly not millionaires, managed to obtain invitations to houses the threshold of which his own cousin had never crossed, and was never likely to cross.

When he asked his cousin for an explanation of the enigma, revealing perhaps at the same time some portion of his admiration and liking for Miss Legerton—he being a sensible man, and a proud—was so impressed by what Mrs. Tyndale said that he forthwith packed his portmanteau and returned to Hillfordshire.

"After all," he thought, "some quiet, stupid little girl, out of a country rectory,



would be a more suitable wife for me, and a better mother to the sons and daughters I may have than Miss Legerton, though she does sing like an angel, and though I have seen her look like a saint."

All unconscious of having in any way played a double part, Honoria walked on, singing in her heart more cheerily the song Madame Felicia was to "make." As months and years go, no great length of time had passed since she listened to her first love story, told in the rose-garden, but as time counts in a woman's experience, a quarter of a century seemed to stretch between the sweet good happy days of hope and idleness and those which were not so good and not so happy.

And yet in the Elmvale time she was not more foolish than when she met, after meeting so many other men and not caring one do it about them, Godfrey Daymes.

Yes, her dislike of parties dated from the

time when she could not go to *the* party she desired to attend—her best sunshine had shone upon her since she knew the owner of Pine Hills.

Ah! how suitable a match had it been for both; how utterly equal a match if she were only Miss Legerton of Antlet Hall, visiting in London under the charge of some discreet dowager, but how utterly unsuitable for Mr. Daymes, now she was not even Miss Legerton of the Cottage; not even the Honoria of Hackney, living quietly with her mother, but a pushing teacher residing with a woman—not over scrupulous and, certainly beneath the mere surface-polish, not over refined.

There is a change which takes place in some natures as gradually as summer fades away into autumn, and autumn into winter. We cannot tell from day to day what the precise alteration is, and yet at the end of a few years, or even a much shorter period, the snow of December presents no greater

contrast to the roses of June than the sordid man or the unabashed woman exposed to a course of deteriorating influences to the boy once honest, ingenuous, generous—to the girl, retiring as a modest violet, as fair and sweet.

So far, Miss Rodwell's influence, and constant association with that clever lady had not destroyed the freshness and the simplicity of Honoria's character; but Her Mother's Darling was hardening—she was mixing constantly with people who were worldly, conventional, and wealthy; she was flattered to the top of her bent, fooled as society will to the end of time fool those who possess genius, and in her home life there was now nothing to serve as an antidote to the bane.

Had any one asked Honoria's honest opinion of herself at the period of which I am writing, she would, had she answered truly, have said,

"I think I am very much improved. I can talk better, sing better, write better. I fancy I am better looking; at all events, I am well dressed and no longer nervous. I am not at all ashamed to meet any enemy in the gate. I can hold my own I flatter myself. I am no longer *gauche*. I defy any one to say I have ever allowed her to patronise me; and even when I talk to the very cleverest people at Miss Rodwell's little evenings, I do not feel a simpleton."

Ah! well, Honie, perhaps it was all for the best. Many human beings have to thread tortuous lanes and traverse weary roads, deep in mud and dust, in order to reach the blessed goal of rest God gives eventually to the most sorrowful among us; and happy the creature sent out to tread the world alone who does not, when the rest comes, find some grievous sin haunting his memory.

No sin the world calls such had as yet

touched the hem of Honoria's garment, for she was one of those carefully-nurtured women to whom even the very idea of sin is very terrible. Still, quite unconsciously, she was being compromised.

There went to the Fernsmen whom it might have been preferable to meet in the vague safety of a large assemblage than to admit into the charmed precincts of a small private circle ; and women were welcomed there, also, to whom, however good and admirable they might be in many respects, the majority of brothers and husbands would not have cared to introduce their sisters and wives.

The time had long gone by when such little details as an exact marriage ceremony meant much or indeed signified anything to Miss Rodwell. She could be blind or long-sighted as best suited her purpose, and if a ~~roue~~ could advance her social interests or it added a feather to her cap to be able to

induce Signora, Madame, Mademoiselle, Mrs. or Miss, to appear at some great assemblage where even a duchess might in vain have requested her presence, Miss Rodwell was too true a woman of the world to permit any scruples to stand in her way about obtaining the especial person desired.

All of which would be of course impossible, save in London, or some other great city, while even in London Miss Rodwell became known to those who were at all behind the scenes as a woman who hovered between the notes of respectability and its reverse, whatever that may be.

She had, however, proved successful in almost all her attempts to get the better of society, whilst Madame Felicia, notwithstanding her genius, after having once ridden on the top of the billows, was now almost engulfed by them. Of her position at the moment, Miss Rodwell knew more than she had told Honoria, who, after walking steadily

along streets with which she had only the slightest acquaintance, at length turned into one which filled her with astonishment.

"Miss Rodwell must have made some mistake," she thought, as she looked at the houses on each side of the way — those houses once inhabited by people well to do, if not wealthy, but from which the glory had departed years before she was thought of.

"Yes ; there must be some great mistake," she repeated, as she paused and examined the number on an open door, and compared it with that on the paper Miss Rodwell had given her.

She looked around irresolutely. Madame Felicia *could not* live in such a house. The very idea was impossible. Not that the house, if the door had been ordinarily kept shut and the steps cleaned and the paint renewed, would have been a bad one. The hall was wide, much wider indeed than many Honoria could remember to have

entered in very good company, yet not merely had it no covering of any description, but although the season was spring and the weather fine, the floor was grimed with the passage of many feet, while the stairs also uncarpeted were dirtier still.

The right-hand lintel of the doorway was ornamented with bell-handles, no less than eight of which Honoria counted as she stood in perfect bewilderment on the steps of number forty-three.

“Were you wanting anybody, Miss,” asked a woman who at this juncture jostled against her.

“Yes; but I think I must have made some mistake,” said Honoria, reverting to her mental formula. “Does Madame Dechemont live here—or is there another Corunna Street?”

“There ain’t no other Corunner Street as I knows on,” answered the woman somewhat sulkily, for she evidently felt as a



personal grievance Honoria's implied though not expressed reflection on the thoroughfare, which she considered "particularly genteel," "and Madame Deacheremount or Feliciar, as the postman calls her, lives on the third-floor front. My rooms is in the basement, but if you please I will show you their door. You might ring their bell, of course, but they make a fine fuss about answering it. Mr. Feliciar in particular, I can tell you."

From the accidents which the acceptance of such an offer might have involved Honoria's instinct saved her.

"Thank you," she said, and the smile, which was her one great beauty, shone out and provoked an answering brightness from the person she addressed, "but I can find my way to the third floor without the slightest difficulty, and I couldn't possibly allow you to climb all those flights of stairs

on my account."



“Well, they are a lot,” was the reply, “and your legs are younger nor mine; but still, miss, no offence meant, do you know the lady well?”

“I don’t know her at all,” said Honoria, “but I wish to see her on business.”

“Then if I was you—still I hopes no offence meant nor taken — supposing Mr. Feliciar is at home, I’d just say I’d call again. He do go on dreadful, and in partikeler would go on wus afore the likes of you.”

“The likes of me!” repeated Honoria in astonishment, “what do you suppose I am?”

“Just a lady, miss, and as such not used to the langwidge Mr. Feliciar talks in.”

For a minute Honoria hesitated whether or not she should abandon her enterprise, but the idea of the scornful smile Miss Rodwell’s face would bear the while she scoffed at her fears, determined her to see the matter out, and she therefore said,

"If Monsieur Dechemont is within, I shall probably follow your advice. I thank you for it very much."

"You are kindly welcome," was the answer. "Madame is a bit of a onener herself, but she ain't a patch on him."

"Now I wonder," considered Honoria as she slowly ascended the staircase, "what a onener is! Something not pleasant to encounter, most likely, or else Miss Rodwell would have conducted the business herself instead of entrusting it to me."

One story—two storeys. Honoria had nearly ascended half way to the third, when a perfect Babel of sound arrested her progress.

A rough voice—uttering imprecations with a delightful impartiality in French, Spanish, and English—was answered at intervals by a shrill soprano—which, so far as Honoria could distinguish the words,   
                    as good as it got. Every now

and then a third person interposed in a lower and milder key, evidently trying to make peace, but failing signally in the endeavour.

On the landing she had now gained was a window provided with a low, broad seat, and here Honoria sat down for a little to rest, and consider what she had better do next.

If she went back now, she might only have to return another day, and find Monsieur Dechemont still swearing fluently. Evidently it was his natural language, a language in which he conversed so constantly that his fellow-lodgers were well acquainted with its accents.

“I have plenty of leisure to-day, so I shall wait for a time at any rate. I do not much care whether Madame is to be propitiated or not; but I should not like to return and tell Miss Rodwell I was afraid to encounter her.”

Still the battle raged ; Honoria looking out on the dreary yards below in every one of which clothes in different states of raggedness and yellowness were hanging on lines to dry, could hear Monsieur Dechemont inveighing against fortune, society, England, the English, his wife, his own ill-luck, his own admirable disposition and unrecognized talents. The point in dispute and to which he came back continually, after his little verbal excursions upon other subjects, seemed to be that Madame Dechemont refused to tell him how or when she expected to obtain sufficient money to appear in public.

“ You bring me back to this vile contemptible country—where a man like me, a man I say, is lost, stranded, dead—on the pretence of making money, obtaining engagements ; and we come to a hole—lodge ourselves amongst the sweepings of this city, and all I can get out of you is patience and patience ! ”

Then uprose the woman's voice,

"Bring you here—brute, beast, demon. Did you not follow me when I refused to stay among your vile companions, your gamblers, your cut-throats, your gold-diggers, your thieves? Go—only go; leave me in peace, and you shall have half I earn—half did I say?—you shall have all save the pittance I need to keep soul and body together."

"Yes," struck in the third actor; "only leave her, only let her have a few years of peace and quiet, and we will send you all she makes. Poor as I am I will support her."

Then Dechemont turned, and with a torrent of oaths bid him mind his own business and not interfere with matters which did not concern him.

"Bah! You don't even know the name of your own father," he finished.

"I know his name was not Auguste


Dechemont, and thank God for it," was the answer.

"Ay, and you may thank God," chimed in madame. "He was a man, brave as a lion, gentle as a lamb; the soul of honour—"

"By St. Joseph," interrupted Monsieur Dechemont, apparently unable to endure the sound of such flattering epithets heaped upon another, "you are enough to drive me mad. Does it not suffice that I am tied to you, that I am cursed with a wife old, ugly, viperish, but you must sicken me with praises of a villain who—"

"Hold," cried madame; "say what you were going to say, and I stab you to the heart. He was no villain; he was good, he was noble, he was without fear and without reproach."

At which point Dechemont took his part in the music, and he and madame raged and swore and screamed together to such an extent



that Honoria rose to fly, and had reached the first step of the stairs when the door above was flung open, and Dechemont, hurling a Parthian curse behind him, rushed down the flight, almost carrying Honoria with him in his descent.

While she stood recovering her breath, which had indeed been well-nigh frightened out of her body, the door Dechemont banged behind him again opened, and a young man came down the stairs in more leisurely fashion. He was brushing his hat with his sleeve as he descended, and did not notice that any one stood on the landing till he arrived at the last step. Then he looked up and exclaimed,

“Miss Legerton! what in the world brings *you* here?”

“Oh! Signor, I am so delighted to see you,” gasped Honoria, “I—I came to see Madame Felicia. Can you tell me where to find her?”



"Certainly," he answered. "Come with me," and re-ascending the flight he knocked at the door of the now quiet room.

"Entrez," screamed out madame in a shrill ear-piercing voice. "Oh! 'tis you, Henri; what have you forgotten?"

"I have forgotten nothing," was the answer, "but this young lady wished to see you, and so I turned back to introduce her—Madame Dechemont—Miss Legerton—Miss Legerton—my mother."

"Your mother, signor," repeated Honoria in amazement. "I am so thankful to know that, for now I shall not be afraid to ask Madame Dechemont a favour."

"If there is anything Felicia Dechemont can do for her son's kind friend, Miss Legerton may consider it performed," said madame with such easy grace, with such ladylike self-possession, that for a moment Honoria thought her senses must have

played her false, and that the poor lodging-house—the bare hall—the uncarpeted staircase—the unholy wrangle must all be parts and parcels of some grotesque delusion.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MADAME TRANSFORMED.

HOWEVER great the charms of Madame Dechemont's manner might be, the beauties of her person were not so apparent ; and even in the first moment of astonishment at the lady's self-possession, Honoria found herself blankly contemplating the dress and appearance of the sweet singer who was to make her reputation.

What she beheld was, in fact, a woman no longer young, and who looked even older than her actual age—small, slight, almost wizened in appearance ; with a sallow skin, bright, beady, restless eyes, black hair turn-

ing grey, bound round with a yellow and red silk handkerchief. Her external attire consisted simply of a dressing-wrapper far from new, and certainly as far from clean. Her hands did not appear to have been recently washed, and her small feet, covered with sad-coloured stockings, were thrust into slippers down at the heel.

As for the room where madame received, all the furniture it contained consisted of an easy old chair upholstered in leather, now all tattered and torn; an even older sofa even more tattered and more torn; a few ordinary chairs covered with hair-cloth, a Pembroke table, one leg of which was propped up with a piece of wood; a little spindly loo, still littered with the remains of an untidy and meagre breakfast, and a few boxes. The centre of the floor was covered with a square of faded drugget; the fender and fire-irons were rusty, and the grate, on one hob of which simmered a tea-kettle, was innocent

of blacklead ; while, through the curtainless windows, the sun shone in and mercilessly showed up every patch and stain on the ugly dirty paper with which the walls were hung.

“ Pray sit down,” said madame, offering Honoria the arm-chair as though it had been a throne of state, “ and make friends with me. I have been your friend this many a day. Henri has written to me such accounts of your kindness to him, that I feel we do not now meet for the first time.”

“ If you allow me, Miss Legerton,” broke in Signor Gonfroni at this juncture, “ I will wait for you outside till you have spoken to my mother. This is scarcely a fit neighbourhood for a lady to wander about in alone,” and he would have left the room had Honoria not entreated him to remain.

“ I have no secrets to talk over with Madame Dechemont,” she remarked. “ I came here sorely against my will and in fear

and trembling to prefer a petition. Now, even if it is refused, I shall go away much happier than I felt half an hour ago."

"The petition shall not be refused," declared madame, knitting her lean fingers together, and looking across the table with a smile meant to be re-assuring, but which, in consequence of her remarkable costume, made her resemble a malevolent old witch.

"You shall not promise till you know the extent of my presumption," said Honoria, blushing becomingly and hesitating with a pretty confusion; "the fact is I came to—that is, I mean—will you, madam—would you sing one of my songs?"

Madame jumped up and her brows knitted. For a second she stood silent; her eyes cast down, her foot beating a tattoo on the floor; then she recovered herself, and, addressing her son, asked, "What are these songs of Mademoiselle, Henri? Are they of me? Can I do them justice?"

"No one better," was the answer.

"Sing—sing—somebody sing—give me the idea," cried the little woman; then as Honoria, with trembling fingers, began to untie her parcel, it was snatched from her hands; and madame, walking up and down the room, scowled at the notes with the expression of a demon.

Suddenly she paused and her face cleared—in a moment she seemed transformed; the dingy dressing-wrapper, the fantastic head-dress, at once assumed the proportions of theatrical properties.

"Listen," she commanded, raising her hand, and as she did so the wide sleeve of her dress fell back, and her attitude might have brought down the applause of any house. "Listen; is it this?"

And then through the bare poor room there rose and fell a voice which, with its tones, brought back visions of youth and hope and all things good and joyous to the singer.

For the moment she was old no longer ; her beauty was a possession of the present instead of a memory of the past.

With the melody herself made, she wrought a temporary enchantment for her soul. The lines were effaced from round her mouth, the furrows cleared from off her brow ; her eyes softened and sparkled as they had done in the years so far, far away in the dim distance. She was young, —she was fair—she was admired—she was courted. She was once again Madame Felicia, with a clear future before her, with the world at her feet. Faded the bare mean room, with its sordid accessories ; dim grew the memory of the man she called husband—she forgot she had no audience, save a girl and a stripling. She was singing, not in the cold sunlight of a day in spring but under hundreds of gas-lamps, to a crowded audience ; she was dressed in robes of price, with jewels sparkling on



her neck and circling her arms. She could even scent the fragrance of the bouquet her hand once held, and for one moment,—so great was the illusion—when the final note died away, she waited expectantly for the clapping of many hands, for the enthusiastic *encore* which had made such music in her ears, many and many a time in the brilliant past, which had once been so happy as well as so prosperous.

The delusion lasted only an instant. For that second she stood with body bent a little forward, with hands clasped on her breast ready to curtsy her acknowledgments to an admiring public; then—remembering—she broke into a shrill laugh, and, with a “Bah! I thought I had a great audience,” looked keenly at Honoria, who was white with sympathy and excitement.

“Have I your meaning?” asked madame.

“Oh! I never imagined the song could

sound so well. Miss Rodwell told me you were the only person who could make it; but you do more than that, you remake it."

"You can turn a pretty compliment as well as compose a sweet melody," said madame, who was by this time in high good humour.

"Now let me think, let me consider. To sing this song, or any song, I must have engagements. To have engagements, it is needful that I hire apartments in a good neighbourhood where I can see my people of business. To go to them poor is to come away from them sorry. I should have a brougham, but perhaps that can wait. An Erard I can hire. It is needful that my wardrobe be replenished. Now, how much will all that cost, or rather for how little can all that be done?"

Honoria's heart sank within her as she heard Madame Felicia recite the items of the stock-in-trade she required in order to

start afresh. That madame, attired in an old silk handkerchief and a dirty dressing-wrapper, could not "receive" in a third-floor in Corunna Street, had, indeed, occurred to her as possible from the first, but that madame had not a decent gown in her portmanteau, or a sovereign to buy one with, never till she was thus taken into her confidence crossed her mind.

She had gone to Corunna Street prepared to pay for having her song sung, but she felt appalled at the visions of expense suggested by Madame Felicia's soliloquy.

Nevertheless, she spoke out bravely and said, "So far as I am able to meet your wishes I desire to do so."

Madame looked up at her in amazement. "You child, what could you do? I shall not take your money. Any arrangements I make about your songs, I shall make with the publisher, not with you. He shall pay me out of his profits, not out of yours. No.

I was only thinking how to manage. I have thought often before, but now I *will* manage. I was dull—I was doubtful—I was miserable an hour ago. Now my youth is renewed. I can sing—I did not know—I was afraid before. Since you came the sunshine of summer has come too ! I feel it ; it is warming me even now—the chrysalis will soon be the butterfly. When we meet again, it shall happen that you forget Madame Dechemont, this room, Corunna Street ; you will only remember Madame Felicia, with whom time—which has stolen away all other good things from her—has still left one gift. Yes ; I can sing—my voice has not lost its cunning—my heart its faith. Go now ; go both of you, I have business to do, and that at once.” And as Honoria would have approached her to bid farewell, she waved her back, and passing into an inner room, closed the door behind her.

“ The sooner we are off now the better,”

said the young fellow who styled himself Signor Gonfroni to his companion ; “ we will take your music, too ; when my mother is ready for it, she can procure it for herself.”

Down the staircase they proceeded in silence, and almost in silence they paced along side by side, till they came within sight of a great and bustling thoroughfare. Before they reached it, Honoria paused for a moment and said—

“ I think I will take the first cab we meet, and get home quickly. I have been so long away ;” then, after a pause, she went on hurriedly—“ There is one thing I want to tell you, signor. You may think it strange I should mention it perhaps, but I wish you to understand that I shall never mention to Miss Rodwell or any one else what I have seen and heard to-day. I could not help seeing—I might have helped hearing, perhaps, though I did not think of that at the time—but I want you to know it

will all be, so far as other people are concerned, just the same as if I had not seen—as if I not had heard.”

He did not answer her ; he turned his head and looked across the street at an empty cab, the driver of which he hailed.

Very carefully he guarded the flounces of Honoria's dress from contact with the wheels. Very quietly he closed the door, and then taking off his hat, stood bareheaded before her.

“Good-bye,” she said, stretching out her hand. “Good-bye,” he answered, taking and holding it tightly as he spoke. “God bless you, Miss Legerton. It is not all grief to me that to-day you have been behind the scenes. I may take courage now to speak to you sometimes of things I have often longed, but feared to mention.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AN OLD FRIEND.

THE height of the London season—a crowded concert room, fans playing with the ceaselessness and almost the regularity of machinery ; portly dowagers, slender daughters, young men who looked bored, old men who seemed interested—a motley crowd of people who either loved music for its own sake, or came to hear it for the sake of the recollections it evoked, stewing in the one and two shilling parts of the room ; a faint and almost impotent attempt at applause when a dreary duet between violin and piano was concluded. Then a minutes silence, and the “ house rose.”

Such clapping, such cheering, such stamping! Accustomed though Honoria was to ebullitions of popular feeling, she could not avoid glancing nervously up from her seat, conveniently near the door leading into the artistes' room, and looking around to see if the building were in danger of coming down about her ears.

A single figure, standing in front of the platform, curtsied again and again in acknowledgment of this continued applause.

The figure was that of a woman attired in a dress of pink satin, trimmed with what appeared to be magnificent white lace. Her black hair was wound round her head like a coronet, and a single white rose nestled amongst the coils; the bracelets on her arms glittered as she crossed her hands on her bosom and curtsied lower and lower still, and when with a queenly gesture she raised her head and looked at the audience, the brooch fastening her bodice and the



locket at her throat flashed and sparkled in the gas-light.

In one hand she carried a bouquet composed of exquisite flowers, in the other her music, which even while the applause continued she commenced to unfold.

"Does not look a day older," remarked one elderly gentleman to another, pounding his stick on the floor vigorously as he spoke.

"It makes one young again to see Felicia come back again fresh as the flowers in May," was the answer.

"Am I going mad," whispered Honoria to Miss Rodwell; "or have I been mad, that cannot be Madame Dechemont?"

"Hush!" said Miss Rodwell, and softly as she spoke the word was taken up by those who sat around, and spread through the room.

"Hush-sh-h," and the applause died away, and the clapping subsided, and the

stamping ceased, and then the pure exquisite voice, sounding as fresh as ever, and far, far more matured, poured out in an almost utter silence one of the airs with which the singer had years before been identified—‘Auld Robin Gray.’

As she proceeded Honoria closed her eyes, and then opened them to make sure she was not dreaming. Was the room in Corunna Street, with its wizened, elderly, slatternly-looking inmate, the illusion,—or the brilliantly-lighted concert room, with its fashionable company, listening spell-bound to a woman whose youth seemed restored, in whose cheeks bloomed roses time had withered long before, whose figure was plump and shapely ; in whose hair no streak of grey appeared ; whose dress might have been worn by a duchess, and whose gems were rich and rare as those of the maiden whose freak it was to walk round Ireland unprotected and on foot ?

During the time she had lived under the same roof with Miss Rodwell, Honoria had become learned in powders, paints, and washes ; she had seen singers and actresses by daylight as well as in the evening, and noted the different tales told by that unflattering old cynic, the sun, and the more complaisant gas. She knew how hair could be "constructed," complexions "created," dresses padded, physical defects concealed or softened. She had beheld a woman's face in process of being made up, and viewed with wonder one half of it perfected to a state of superhuman beauty, while the other as yet untouched looked like an uncleaned old painting in a picture-dealer's shop ; but never before, never, had she first been privileged to see a lady looking plainer than nature ever intended her to look, perfectly unembellished by any extraneous ornament, even that of cleanliness, cumbered and rendered

even ugly by reason of the extraordinary style of her apparel, and then suddenly introduced to her, dressed like the Queen of Sheba, painted, powdered, coiffeured, rejuvenated—given back to her admirers apparently as young, as winning, as when she left them fifteen—or even more—years previously.

For her time might, so far as appearances went, have stood quite still; and many a man who had heard her sing the same song, when he first came up quite young and hopeful to London, felt as Honoria did, though for a far different reason, that he must be in a dream from which, the moment the song was ended, he should waken to the realities of life. If there had been applause when Madame Felicia began to sing, there was an ovation when she ended. Four times she left the platform, and four times she returned to acknowledge the tumultuous plaudits of the assemblage.

Too thorough an artist to wish to weaken the effect she had produced by repetition, she did not yield to the shouts of "*encore*" till it was quite evident nothing else would content her audience.

Then quietly and with a leisurely grace she once more opened her music, but Honoria could see the flash of triumph in her eyes—the look of exultation in her face—as she fully grasped the fact that time had not robbed her of everything, that she was still as great a favourite as ever—the "sweet singer of old" to hundreds and thousands who had in the bright days departed hung on her accents with wonder and delight.

Ten minutes' interval.

During that interval Miss Rodwell and her companion were surrounded by acquaintances.

"What do you think of Felicia?" said one elderly gentleman, eagerly,

“By Jove! she is a wonder,” remarked a middle-aged man about town. “Can remember being taken to hear her when I was in petticoats.”

“So Gonfroni is her son! He will never push his mother from her stool.”

“I see she is to sing your new ballad, Miss Legerton.”

“Was not there some story about her having married a man of large property, who bribed her to leave England? or was that her story, and did the man not marry her?” said a fifth.

“I think your first reading is the correct one,” answered Mr. Archer. “If you remember, but, of course, you do not remember, the Felicia grew all of a sudden so anxious to cut her former acquaintances that marriage alone could account for such an access of propriety.”

“You will come into the artistes’ room and speak to my mother after your song

I hope, Miss Legerton," said Signor Gonfroni at this juncture, speaking softly over the back of Honoria's chair.

He must have heard Mr. Archer's remark, but not a trace of annoyance or confusion appeared on his face.

"Take me to speak to her now, please," answered Honoria rising and accepting his proffered arm. "I am so weary," she added, as the door closed behind them, "of the babble of all those people."

"There is one person there whose babble I wish you might never hear again," he remarked. "No; I am not going to mention names, neither shall we see my mother just yet. When she has finished, she will be glad to speak to you. Meanwhile, is not it cool and quiet here," he went on, pausing at the end of a short passage, and leaning against an open window which looked out into a narrow lane at the back of the building. "Who would imagine there was such a

braying and banging, and crowding and heat and jostle within fifty feet of where we stand?"

"Who indeed," answered Honoria with a little panting sigh. "Oh! signor, what a success Madame Felicia achieved to-night? I felt as I listened to the clapping, that if I could have won such an ovation, I should be content to die within the hour."

"It seems to me a very poor triumph to wish to win," he answered. "Of course, to my mother it means practically money and comparative ease of mind, but theoretically, as a success to be desired in the abstract for the mere sake of the success, I think you are wrong, and that some day you will feel you are so."

"Why?" she asked.

"What has it all done for one of the sweetest singers in her own particular style who ever 'brought down a house?'" he replied sadly. "You—you—have been



behind the scenes ; you have seen popular favourites without their masks, you know the lives many of them lead, from choice or from necessity. They are always in a whirl of excitement, they never know the blessings of repose. Men and women alike, they are always bows fully strung. If they are not singing in London, they are singing elsewhere. What existence can be harder, or more unsatisfactory. ? Afraid of every air that blows, afraid of the east wind—of fog—of frost—of draughts, trembling lest the organ which is at once so frail and so valuable should become unserviceable, dreading the advent of singers younger and fresher, fearing the verdict of a fickle public!—is the lot of a singer to be so much envied ? ”

“ As you put it, perhaps not, but there is a brighter side. We have seen and heard that brighter side to-night.”

“ And you think it to be desired ? Ah !

believe me, Miss Legerton, fate never was kinder to you than when she sent you that attack of bronchitis. Better, far better, to go on believing in the beauty of the Dead Sea apple than to grasp and find it all dust and ashes in your hand."

"Why, signor, what is the matter?" asked Honoria, laughing. "To hear you talk, any one might imagine you hated your profession and were eminently miserable."

"Any one who thought so would not be far off the mark," he answered. "I do not like my profession, far from it; and though I am not exactly miserable, I am far from happy."

"Are you not imprudent, Miss Legerton, to be standing beside that open window," said Mr. Archer, coming softly along the passage. "May I have the pleasure of taking you back to the hall? Miss Rodwell sent me in search of you."

Very wistfully Honoria looked at her

companion but he only bowed and drew back as Mr. Archer offered his arm for her acceptance.

"I will come for you after your song," he remarked, quite as a matter of course. "Madame has promised to go to The Ferns, and we can all return there together if Miss Rodwell approve of the arrangements."

"In any case I will accompany your mother," said Honoria.

"Madame Dechemont may consider herself honoured," observed Mr. Archer.

"I am sure Madame Dechemont does not consider herself anything of the kind," returned Honoria brusquely.

"I should were I in her place," he said softly, but this remark Miss Legerton discreetly ignored.

When she reached her seat, she perceived that Miss Rodwell's countenance was overcast.

"How can you make yourself so conspicuous with 'that man?'" she asked in an impatient whisper.

"What man?" returned Honoria in a whisper likewise but a defiant one.

"Gonfroni, or Dechemont or whatever his name may be. You should be more careful; in your position you cannot be too careful."

Honoria made no answer, but a red colour burnt on her cheeks, and an angry light flashed in her eyes.

Though Miss Rodwell was "her best friend," Honoria often thought she took too much upon her in the way of command and control.

"If I were a horse and she my driver," Honie sometimes muttered to herself, "she could not allow me less free will."

And then she thought compunctiously of the state of destitution from which Miss Rodwell had rescued her, of the pupils she had

obtained, the great people she had known, the money she had made, all through the lady of whose rule she felt often so impatient.

Her ballad was a success, in its way almost as great a success as 'Auld Robin Gray' had been. Anything, in fact, madame had chosen to sing that night would have received an encore. Honoria's heart thrilled as she felt she too had some part in the vehement applause, that some tiny portion of the cheers and the clapping was for her.

Madame did that night for Miss Legerton what she had never before been known to do for anybody living. When the encores became deafening, and the shouting and clapping maddening, she came back and sang; not the song just concluded, but another by the same composer. A merry, rattling, sprightly little melody, set to jingling witty words, that set every one smiling and laughing, and looking next day in the newspapers

to discover what the lively ditty was called.

While the bravas were still echoing through the hall, Signor Gonfroni touched Honoria's arm.

"My mother will be at your disposal in a moment," he said.

"Do not be long away," entreated Miss Rodwell.

"I am going back with Madame Felicia to The Ferns. Will you come now, or are you going to wait for the end?"

"Of course I am going to wait, and I expect you to do the same."

"No; madame goes straight to The Ferns. You would not wish her, I suppose, to arrive there and find us both absent."

"It can't be helped," said Miss Rodwell, unaffectedly chagrined. "Go, then, I will follow as soon as possible."

"Art thou pleased, child?" asked madame, taking Honoria's hand in both of

hers as they drove along the dimly lighted streets, through which their way lay to The Ferns. "Was not that last morsel a surprise, a tit-bit? Ah! that was Henri's idea. To-morrow you will have all the publishers running after you; but you must send them to me. Yes, we will manage.

"But this is lovely," she cried, when she at length entered the flower-decked hall. "What colour! what greenery! what perfume! My faith, young lady, teaching must be a more money-making profession than I imagined if it enables you to keep up this house, and fill it so full of beauty. Hide thy diminished head, Henri. You work hard, you teach all day long, poor incompetent! yet you can only compass two rooms, and those beyond the pale of fashion."

"And even those two I owe to Miss Legerton's kindness," said the young man with a heightened colour.

"And this house I owe to Miss Rodwell," capped Honoria, who of late had begun to feel that her surroundings might to some people—people she wished to stand well with—seem too fine for her position.

"Rodwell, Rodwell! Who is Miss Rodwell, Henri?"

"A very clever and charming lady," was the reply.

"Ah! ah! But what is she? *Grande dame*, patroness, eccentric, what?"

"Certainly not eccentric," declared Signor Gonfroni.

"Rodwell, Rodwell! I know something of that name. Something which plays hide-and-seek with my memory; which has been peeping round a corner ever since I heard it first mentioned. She remembers me, you say. Well, that stands for nothing. How is it the charming proverb goes, 'More peoples knows Tom Fool than Tom Fool



knows.' Bah! I have it. To be sure, I recollect. Years and years and years ago, a girl of that name came up from the country with sheaves of letters of introduction to everybody who was musical, and to many bodies who were not; she and her father, a clever, handsome, dissipated surgeon. How time passes! It seems as yesterday our laughing at the doctor's notion of his little miss winning all our laurels. She was to set not only your Thames but all your other rivers on fire; but she tried and could not do it. She just did enough to disappoint her friends. She could not sing, she could not act, she could not dance. At one time I fancy her father thought she might succeed in the ballet. Yes, that is why the name sounded not strange. Think you, Miss Legerton, your friend can be a relation of the doctor's daughter?"

"I do not know, and I should not like to put the question," said Honoria, with a

shrewd suspicion that Miss Rodwell was the doctor's daughter.

"If you please, Miss Honie," began Nannie, entering at this moment and acknowledging the magnificence of madame's dress with a profound curtsy. "There is a gentleman, an old friend of yours, waiting to see you. He came early this evening, and I told him he would be sure to find you at home about this time. It—it is Mr. Warren from Antlet, you know."

"Mr. Warren! where is he?" cried Honoria, and with a hasty apology to Madame Felicia she ran upstairs into the drawing-room, where her old acquaintance had been seated for half an hour, surveying with mute astonishment the beauty and the luxury of Honoria's home.

As the door opened, he looked up and for the first time in his life beheld the woman he had wanted to marry—for the first time, probably, beheld any woman in full dress.

The whole splendour of Honoria's appearance was not revealed to him then by reason of a long grey and white burnous fastened round her neck, which covered the upper part of her dress and person; but Mr. Warren saw enough to convince him that his sister's very best silk gown, the gown which as she often stated would stand alone, was an inexpensive and unfashionable sort of affair in comparison to the costume in which he beheld his former love arrayed. Nor was the change in her appearance greater than the change in her manner. For long before she left Antlet, it had been cold, almost repelling; on the single occasion when he had seen her since, namely, on the day of the mother's funeral, it had been simply indifferent. So wrapped up was she then in the thought of her dead, in the blackness of her sorrow, that her words of thanks for the journey he had undertaken were so purely conventional that he

would have preferred her not speaking them at all.

Afterwards, it was true, she did write him a short note, expressing a fear that she had not seemed fully to appreciate his kindness, but the words were so scant, and the tone so chill, that Mr. Warren, never clever at epistolary correspondence, decided he would not answer it till he could do so in person.

Down even at Antlet vague rumours had been heard of Honoria's wonderful change of circumstances, but though Mr. Warren was prepared for some outward evidences of wealth—say, a house at thirty pounds a year, with two parlours communicating, furnished plainly yet substantially, the walls hung with a few prints, and the chimneypieces ornamented with the regulation vases—he had never in his wildest fits of imagination conceived of being welcomed by Honoria, attired as she was, in such a fairy palace.

"Mr. Warren," she exclaimed, holding out both hands as she spoke. "Mr. Warren, I am delighted to see you. I never was so surprised as when Nannie told me you were here. It is good, indeed, to have you under my roof, at last."


"I assure you, Miss Legerton," he began, trying to swallow a lump which seemed choking him.

"Since how long have I been Miss Legerton?" she asked.

"Honie, then," he amended, feeling she was far too kind, far too cordial; that Mrs. Legerton, lying in her lonely grave, was not so far from him as this changed, gracious, lovely, ay, to his thinking, lovely Honoria.

"I felt I could not leave London without making at least an attempt to see you—"

"I should never have forgiven you if you had," she interrupted.



“I have never been in London since—since—”

“No, I am sure you have not, or you would have found me out,” was Honie’s answer; but even as she spoke, a memory of the day he referred to came across her mind. She saw the poor funeral array—the modest hearse without plumes or feathers; the plain coffin carried down the narrow staircase; the solitary coach containing but three mourners, not one of them kith or kin to the dear, calm, quiet dead; and all her heart seemed to rise in rebellion against the man who, with a word, had opened all her old wounds again, and innocently kept them open while he rambled on.

“I was up at the cottage the other day,” he continued. “A relation of Mr. Thomas lives there, as you may remember. He is a very nice gentleman, very nice indeed, with only one daughter. He is in bad

health, and I often think of you and your dear mother when I see them together. Nothing is changed. Your old piano is there still—but Miss Thomas does not play—”

“Thank heaven for that,” thought Honie.

“The roses and the honeysuckles are in full flower now, and the thorn near your poor mother’s favourite seat has been a perfect picture.”

Honoria dug her nails into her hands as she listened.

“The new agent is greatly liked. His lordship has built him a new house on the road to Ripley—do you remember the night I drove you over from the Junction with Belgium?—and it is said he is going to marry one of the rector’s daughters. Yes, thank you, my sister is quite well. She suffers from rheumatism now and then, but she is as active as ever. And—”

"I could not think where you had got to, Honoria," said Miss Rodwell, entering at the moment. "Oh! I beg your pardon," she added, directing a surprised glance towards the stranger. "I thought you were alone."

"This is Mr. Warren," explained Honoria, "a very early and a very kind friend of mine. We were near neighbours at Antlet, were we not?" she added addressing her "kind friend."

"I carried this young lady in my arms from the Hall to the cottage when she was but seven years old," said Mr. Warren, in explanation, to Miss Rodwell, who, rising equal to the occasion, extended her hand and welcomed him to London, remarking at the same time she thought it would puzzle him to carry Honoria now. "Your friend will join us at supper, will he not?" she added, turning to Honoria. "He would like perhaps to meet some of the people we have



with us." And then Miss Rodwell gabbled over a list of names, all of which were in a vague and distant way familiar to Mr. Warren, who said after the manner of his class, that he "did not mind if he stopped and had a look at them."

Quite honestly Miss Rodwell, judging his feelings by her own, fancied she was about to give this aborigine a real treat—the same sort of treat in fact as a servant girl experiences when taken to see all the grand folks in Madame Tussaud's Exhibition.

That he would disapprove of her or her guests was an idea which never entered into her mind, the only thing she did fear was that the brilliancy of the scene might render a man fresh, as she mentally phrased it, "from the plough and the cowshed," uncomfortably conscious of his own shortcomings, social, physical, and mental.

So far, however, from this being the case, Mr. Warren the moment he entered the

supper-room began to sit in judgment on its occupants. Miss Rodwell, with a gracious smile, had asked the stranger to take her downstairs; and though Mr. Warren thought as he afterwards expressed the position, that she "was quite able to take herself down," still, as he could not be rude "to the woman in her own house," he was good enough to accede to her request.

"Now, Mr. Warren, you must sit near me," said the lady, complacently surveying the flowers and fruit, the shaded lights, the glass, the silver, the rare wines, the delicate viands, spread so opportunely to astonish and confound the senses of Honoria's early friend. "Colonel, will you see to Madame Felicia? Herr Drücker there is a vacant chair beside Miss Legerton. Monsieur L'Armeline, may I trouble you to move that lamp the merest trifle? I hope every one is hungry. A concert always make me feel as if I had been fasting for a twelvemonth."

## CHAPTER IX.

### MR. WARREN AGAIN PROPOSES.

ALREADY it was three hours past the time at which supper was usually served at Antlet Farm, but Mr. Warren, having partaken of a steak and drunk a pint of porter in the coffee-room of his hotel, was not so hungry as Miss Rodwell professed to be.

“He could indeed have eaten,” to quote his own terse language, “had there been anything to eat,” but mayonnaise, cold fowls, garnished tongue, lobster salad, jellies, creams, upheaped dishes of strawberries, piles of cherries, ices, and other such dainties and delicacies failed to recommend them-

selves to a man who would rather "have had one good cut off a double Gloucester cheese than all the kickshaws that could be put on a table."

He did indeed permit himself to be helped to some collared beef, "cut so thin that he could have blown it away," but this required so little of his attention that he was able to devote almost all his time to watching his neighbours and listening to their conversation.

Accustomed as he was to the trite remarks of his exemplary sister, and the talk of the few people with whom he chanced to be acquainted in his own neighbourhood—talk chiefly confined to politics, the state of the weather, the prospects of the crops, and the latest local scandal, the winged remarks which flew round Miss Rodwell's table seemed to him godless, immoral, and profane.

Scandal there was in plenty, but what

made it sinful in Mr. Warren's ears was the wit with which it was savoured.

Reputations were hinted away quite as freely as at Antlet, but then the difference between a *tête-à-tête*, and a large party with waiters hearing every word spoken, made all the difference in Mr. Warren's estimation.

The name of the lord who found the money for the Asiatic Theatre, as well as that of the lady for whose sake the ancestral acres were mortgaged, was uttered without the smallest reticence.

The merits of Mr. A.'s plays were acknowledged in the same breath which recited some anecdote of Mrs. A., that made the table roar.

The long story of the iniquities of Mrs. B.'s husband was conveyed in a few sentences; and the humour of Mr. C. taking his latest inamorata on a yachting expedition to touch at those islands where it was

expected some clue might be obtained to the whereabouts of his wife, a passenger by the unfortunate 'Sea Nymph,' never afterwards heard of, was recognised by the listeners with peals of laughter.

"Was that old lady with the nice grey curls you were speaking to this evening, Maria Zebulon's mother?" asked Honoria, during a rare pause in the conversation.

"No, my dear," answered Madame Felicia, "only her hired mamma."

"Her what?" said Mr. Archer.

"Ah! dear friend, but it is good to hear you appear among the Innocents. It is as Saul among the Prophets. But, then, poor Saul was terribly in earnest, and you are not. For Miss Legerton's benefit I explain. It is needful for so attractive a young lady as the Zebulon to have a mamma. Good Heavens! is not the girl handsome? Well, her actual mamma is charming and

fat. I have seen her. She sits at the door of a shop in Mitre Square, and supplies the Christians with oranges at a not unreasonable price. Can the dear Maria take her legitimate mamma from the oranges and the Christians? By no means, the mamma would be miserable, and the daughter also; wherefore the latter looks round, and finding an old lady with a benevolent expression, and a purse well-nigh empty, proposes that the venerable madame shall be her mamma, and go with her everywhere, play propriety, and bring the most eligible of her suitors to settlements and St. George's. That is all—but *how* surprised Miss Rodwell's friend looks at the explanation!"

"Have a glass of champagne, Madame?" suggested Mr. Archer, hurriedly interrupting any remarks Miss Rodwell's friend might deem it necessary to interpose.

“And if not indiscreet,” said Herr Drücker, “since every one seems to have finished, may I suggest, with our dear lady’s permission, that we adjourn to hear that so lovely song once more—Ah! madame, what it is to be eternally young and beautiful!”

“Out of our own sensations, dear Drücker, we shall never be again able to explain what it is to be either,” jibed madame as she rose, and, without heeding her hostess, led the way to the drawing-room.

“I must be going,” said Mr. Warren, clutching Honoria’s dress as he spoke. “Can you spare me a few minutes before I leave.”

“With pleasure,” answered Honoria, still with that fatal kindness of manner, and so, though she hated the man’s reminiscences, still, for the sake of “Auld Lang Syne,” she took him into her own most private sanctum—a room clad with sombre books,



a room furnished with the plainest of furniture and pianos, in the middle of which stood a table groaning under a load of music and manuscripts.

"I have been so glad to see you," she said, breaking the silence with the first conventional words that rose to her lips.

"And I," he answered, "have been at once so glad and so sorry to see you. Glad because the sight of your face, the sound of your voice, must always give me pleasure; sorry because I cannot bear the people amongst whom it appears to me you live familiarly. At Antlet I heard some vague accounts of your having become a fine lady, visiting at great houses; but I never thought you were living the life you are among a lot of fast men and singing women, who swear like bargees and drink champagne as if it was water."

"You do not understand, Mr. Warren," said Honoria, already in a white heat with

anger and astonishment. "Miss Rodwell asked you to stop to-night, thinking it might amuse you to hear the talk and see the manners of a different set of people to any you have ever mixed with before. She made a mistake, it seems; but that is no reason why you should make one too. Foreigners and persons who have resided much abroad use expressions which sound strange doubtless to your ears, but they mean no more by them than Miss Warren when she says, 'Drat it;' and as for your other accusation, if some ladies choose to drink elder wine, it surely cannot be imputed as a sin to others that they prefer a different vintage."

"Ah! Honie, it was not you who spoke that sentence, but the spirit of your associates speaking through you," said Mr. Warren, for it was a fact that Honoria had him upon the hip both as regarded Miss Warren's colloquialisms and the exhilara-

ting beverage she produced for the refreshment of her guests. "It is you who do not understand. What would your mother think if she could only see her daughter associating freely with those shameless foreign women, if she knew of her listening to stories of sin and wickedness turned into utter jest! I am a man, and I feel all the worse for what I have heard and beheld to-night. What must it be for you, a young girl, to sit among those half-clad women (and indeed, Honoria, it grieves me to see you affect their style of dress a little yourself), hearkening to their scandalous anecdotes and their blasphemous language!"

Happily for Honoria there arose before her mind's eye, as Mr. Warren spoke, a vision of that gentleman's sister clothed not merely with modesty as befitted a maiden lady of more than middle age, but also swathed up to her chin, summer and winter, in flannel vests, petticoat, bodices,

and dresses made as high as the structure of her throat would permit.

In a moment Honoria pictured her horror at the sight of Madame Felicia's attire, at the sight indeed of any fashionable lady tricked out for the evening, and the absurdity of the idea so wrought upon her risible faculties, that it was with the greatest difficulty she could refrain from laughter as she tried to convince Mr. Warren there was nothing criminal about the dress, manner, or deportment of the people who were now singing and gabbling away in the drawing-room and on the staircase.

"Do not try to defend them, Honie," he entreated; "do not—say you could not help yourself—that you have been drawn in amongst them, and cannot see your way to extricate yourself from the set—that it has come about in the course of your profession. I always knew what a curse music and that musical woman Mrs. Caruth would prove to

you ; but don't say you like the life or the people, don't Honie, for the sake of the dead and gone. When I think of your mother and then of those painted Jezebels, I turn sick when I consider what a change must have taken place in you before you could endure such companionship ; but leave them, now dear. I know at heart you are the Honie of old ; and if the love of an honest man can give you happiness, why, it is yours now as it was when you lived at the cottage before this mad notion of coming to London was put into your head."

"Mr. Warren, what do you mean?" asked Honoria.

"Just what I say, Honie," he answered, fancying she was surprised at his magnanimity. "Nothing can make any difference in my feelings towards you. Be my wife, and I will keep you safe from trouble and anxiety. No one shall ever know anything from me of what I have heard and seen

to-night. Which shall it be—will you return with me to Antlet Farm to-morrow, or shall I remain in town until the wedding can take place?”

She was standing before him—young, pretty, at the very zenith of success, and yet, as a compliment, as a favour conferred, he asked her to marry him: to give up her future, which seemed to her then so brilliant, and go away with him from off the hilltops down into the lowly valley and the dull, dreary house she remembered so well and hated so thoroughly.

“I suppose I ought to be very much obliged to you,” she answered, after a minute’s pause. “Indeed, I am very much obliged to you, but I cannot accept your offer; it is impossible I should ever marry you. Please let me finish,” she went on, as he tried to interrupt her. “You have to-night expressed your opinions very freely about my friends. I will emulate your frankness,

and tell you that whether this life be good or bad, it is one which suits me; and whether your life be good or bad, it is one which would kill me. I know you have paid me the highest compliment that can be paid to a woman, but I must refuse to accept it. When I was poor, very poor, you wanted me to marry you, if you remember, and I felt as grateful as I could then feel. Now—”

“Now,” he remarked, as she hesitated, “you are differently placed; you are no longer poor; you are happy, I dare say; you are surrounded by people who, I have no doubt, break every one of the commandments, and could make merry over the grief and shame of their nearest and dearest. If there was no chance for me when I wanted to keep you and your mother at Antlet, there is far less chance for me now. That, I suppose, is your meaning, though you would scarcely like to put it in such plain words.”

"If the form of words you have used please you, Mr. Warren, surely it may satisfy me," she retorted.

"Good-bye, then," he said; "that is over. Will you shake hands?"

"Of course," she answered, softening a little. "Why should we not part friends?"

"Friends!" he repeated, almost flinging her hand from him. "Friends, indeed!" and he was gone.

How long Honoria stood where he had left her she scarcely knew. The sound of her own name repeated in two or three languages by several people induced her at length to move and open the door.

"We heard him go," cried Madame Felicia.

"I met him in the hall," said Miss Rodwell, "and was about to express some civil hope that he would honour us again with his delightful society, when he pushed past me, and telling one of the waiters who asked



if he should call a cab 'to get out of his way,' rushed down the steps. What have you done to him, Honoria?"

"He has been lecturing her," guessed Madame Felicia; "expostulating with her on the sin of keeping late hours and consorting with women who rouge and powder."

"No," said Mrs. Sieveking, "he has been asking her to marry him—good gracious! Miss Legerton, how you blush—and she objected because the settlements were not satisfactory."

"I vote Miss Legerton does marry him," cried a pert little actress. "He is not quite old enough, to be sure, but he will mend of that, and we all want a country house where we can refresh ourselves after the fatigues of the season. We will go and spend our holidays there—rise early, and drink new milk, and lead a simple and pastoral life."

"And you can send us up hampers of

farm produce," added Mrs. Sieveking. "A tender little pig, a few pounds of good butter, and an occasional basket of eggs, would be appreciated at Islington."

"By the bye, Mrs. Sieveking, do you see much of your admirer, Mr. Chervil, now?" asked Mr. Archer, with a view of turning the tables on Honoria's tormentor.

"Mr. Chervil and I parted for ever yesterday," was the answer.

"After a quarrel?" interrogated Miss Rodwell.

"No; we parted on the most amicable terms. But I told him to look in the 'Athenæum' to-day, and I shall never see him again."

"Yes? Well? What then? What is there in the 'Athenæum'?" asked four voices all at once.

"Only," said Mr. Chervil's friend demurely, "the announcement of a new novel by the author of 'The Spitalfields Weaver.'"

"Chervil himself wrote it; at least, so Mrs. Mirand told me," remarked Miss Rodwell.

"Chervil himself did not write it, as it happens."

"Then who is the author?" asked Mr. Archer.

"Ah! that is the fun of the thing. The new novel is called 'The Pretty Maid of Islington,' and it is by Sarah Julia Sieveking."

An utter silence fell upon the party at this announcement. If every one present had been stricken dumb, a greater miracle of stillness could not have been wrought.

"Farewell, my dears," said Mrs. Sieveking, laughing. "I see you do not believe me now; but perhaps you, like Mr. Chervil, will look in the 'Athenæum.'"

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Miss Rodwell, as Mrs. Sieveking's brougham drove off to the "wilds of Islington."

"Quite possible. She is a very clever as well as a very mischievous little woman," said Mr. Archer, who had met with more than one rebuff in that quarter.

"I do not believe a word of it," remarked the actress. "I never could see anything in Mrs. Sieveking except her impudence."

"Mrs. Mirand always declared she was a very remarkable person," observed Miss Rodwell thoughtfully.

"And we know that 'Children and fools speak the truth,'" said Madame Felicia. "Good-night, my dear—or rather good-morning. It is time we were all in bed. I want you a minute," she added, speaking to Honoria, who followed her out of the room. "Go on, Henri; I have a word for Miss Legerton's most private ear. So you could not fancy," she continued "the dear papa for a husband. It is perhaps a pity,

for he would have taken good care of you."

"I should have been miserable, most miserable," sighed Honoria.

"Ah! well. How goes the proverb. 'After single, marriage is best.' But you must be careful of yourself single. The matter-of-fact gentleman did not like *us*. No, don't try to contradict me; I saw it. And between you and me, my love, the dear papa is right. We are not likeable to any one who understands us. I am not. Miss Rodwell is not. There was not an honest fellow in the room to-night, except Henri and your suitor, if he be really honest. But there are degrees in all things, and the degree you must avoid is a certain gentleman who is not an artiste. Give him the coldest of cold shoulders; he will compromise you if he can. Now go and get your beauty sleep."

But that night Honoria never once closed

her eyes. Wearily, wearily the hours of the early summer morning dragged on to a monotonous chant which ran in this fashion,

“Children and fools speak the truth.  
He will compromise you if he can.”

## CHAPTER X.

### SUCCESS.

THE summer sped by—faster than ever any summer had sped in Honoria's experience.

She was prospering—nay, she was prosperous. She had more pupils than she could well teach. Madame Felicia, strolling in the provinces, sang her songs everywhere; and the consequence proved not only that publishers were complaisant, but that country mammas prevailed on rosy daughters' papas to let "the girls" have a few lessons when they all ran up to town in those broiling

days people from the provinces seem to delight in spending in London.

Yes, she was very busy, and Honoria had decided on the night when she refused Mr. Warren for the last time, that to be busy was her best chance of happiness. Lying awake while the sun stole by slow degrees into her room, she grasped two facts, viz., that she could never marry Mr. Warren, and that for some reason she need never expect any man for whom she could care to care for her.

Madame Felicia's son she knew cared for her, and she liked him, with a frank, trusting liking, which had not a trace of love in it and—

No—she had seen too much of the world. She had grown too much accustomed to self-analysis, even to seek to gloss over the truth; she did care for Godfrey Daymes and he—he would never seek her for his wife.

She looked back to the night when in the



rose-garden at Elmvale, Mr. Carder had spoken those words which spoiled so many an hour of her after life, and she knew that though his selfish baseness had crushed for years all thoughts of love, still the capacity for loving was not dead, but had put forth bud and leaf again at the seeking of a worthier suitor.

For Mr. Daymes had sought her. Where she went he went. Whenever he could frame a pretext for visiting The Ferns, he called, ostensibly to see Miss Rodwell it is true, but in reality to talk to herself Honoria knew.

That Miss Rodwell conceived his attentions were due to her charms counted for nothing. Miss Rodwell was in the habit of considering or of professing to consider that men found her irresistible, and, indeed, she was perhaps justified in this opinion, for few ladies had ever received and refused so many ineligible offers.

Had the right individual come forward, he might have induced her to change her opinions on the subject of single blessedness; but no person who was at once a gentleman and possessed of a sufficient income had as yet put the question. Men who wanted a wife for the "head of their table," a "clever managing woman" "to look after their household," a lady who could "get them into society," or a "helpmate who would find the cash for a joint establishment," had all and many of them proposed, but the ideal suitor never came boldly forward. They talked, they laughed, they were very friendly, and then, they "rode away," just as Godfrey Daymes did, only Godfrey Daymes had never looked on Miss Rodwell as an end, only as a means.

Miss Rodwell had, however, considered him as an end, and a very good one too. Though he was years younger than she—  
what did that signify? Men often married

wives older than themselves, and, moreover, it was Miss Rodwell's conviction that she did not look anything like her real age.

Further, she knew exactly what Pinehills, Mr. Daymes' place, required—a mistress who, while seeming to defer to Mrs. Daymes, senior, should still really rule and manage everything—inaugurate a reign of hospitality and jollity—make home pleasant for the squire—show him how to spend his income in his own county and amongst his own people, and remove the gloom which had hung so long over the old-fashioned rooms, and dwelt amongst the dark pine woods surrounding the dwelling where Godfrey Daymes, the present owner's uncle, dreamed away a wasted life.

Almost as well as she knew The Ferns, Miss Rodwell knew that old place in far away Hillfordshire. She and her young companions had trespassed hundreds and

hundreds of times on those grounds so jealously closed against the public.

They had been chased by the keepers and reprimanded by the gardener, and called "varmints" by the bailiff, and troublesome young urchins by the woodmen. Yes, she knew every nook and corner of those grounds better than the owner himself in the days when she was young, and since those days she had met Mrs. Daymes and visited at Pine-hills with her friends from Wimpledon, and was quite in a position to claim acquaintance with Godfrey Daymes, nephew of the previous Godfrey, when she came across him in London.

It was exactly a marriage which would have suited her—the marriage, indeed, to to which she would have consented; but Mr. Daymes did not propose, and so nothing came of it. Neither did he say any word to Honoria; and with a sense of sore humiliation, Honoria, who once believed Mr.

Daymes "liked her a little," turned back to her work, and began to think "making money was, after all, the only tangible good in life."

As for Mr. Warren's words and Madame Felicia's warning, she had soon got over their smart, if she could not quite forget their significance. Why should she lead the life of a hermit, because some of the people among whom her lot was cast chanced to offend the prejudices of a man whose horizon was bounded with fields of mangold and acres of wheat? They were amusing people, all, and some of them very useful. Had she been Miss Legerton of Antlet, perhaps she might never have come in contact with them, or might have preferred other society; but she was not Miss Legerton of Antlet—she was Miss Legerton, a teacher and composer, who had to earn her daily bread and provide a morsel for her old age, and who would be simply

insane to reject the friendship and companionship of persons who could advance her views,—which reasoning also held good with regard to Mr. Archer.

“Compromise her,”—Honorina had blushed for a week whenever the phrase recurred to memory, and during that week she did indeed present so very cold a shoulder to her patron, that Miss Rodwell remonstrated with her on the folly of her conduct.

“He can give you introductions, get you reviews; mention your name in a thousand ways that may be advantageous to you. Don’t be so stupid as to fling back his offered kindness. What is that you say? you do not like his manner. My dear girl, if we snubbed every one whose manner we did not like, we should have an extremely small visiting circle. Madame Felicia advised you to be careful about him, did she? A very proper judge of propriety, I am sure *she* is. We

shall soon have you taking the opinion of the *demi-monde* as to what is and is not correct."

"Is Madame Felicia, then, a near relative of the *demi-monde*?" asked Honoria.

"She is a woman who has compromised herself as far as a woman can without being actually tabooed among decent people," was the calm reply; "but, for Heaven's sake, do not on that account turn up your virtuous nose at her. There is a sort of social statute of limitations for such erratic geniuses as madame; and I have no doubt she will be received at the next festival as if she had spent all her life in innocence, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

"So, after all, the only thing I am to think about or consider is the success of my songs?"

"Precisely. As regards other matters, the woman who cannot take care of herself,

is not worth taking care of. Look at me. I have been mixing among all sorts and conditions of men ever since I was twenty, and I defy any man, or, what is more to the purpose, any woman even to whisper a word against me."

"The moral being that Mr. Archer may come here as often as he likes, and the world will find nothing to say about me."

"Not if you are prudent. Of course, if you choose to be foolish, people will talk about you as they talk about others. Mr. Archer is known to affect the society of artistes; to delight in the company of authors, actors, singers; to be passionately fond of music; to like in a proper sort of way every woman better than his wife, and still in a proper sort of way every fireside better than his own. He has given a helping hand to many a struggling writer and musician, and I for one never heard of



his friendship and assistance proving other than beneficial to anybody."

"Do you mean to say Mr. Archer is married?" asked Honoria in a gradual *crescendo*.

"Now, Honie, do not, for Heaven's sake, affect these airs of innocence. Bless my soul, did you think he was in love with you; about to ask you to share his cup and platter; that he was an eligible running loose about the world? Married; I hold he is very much married. His wife is a sallow, sickly dowdy—utterly destitute of beauty, manner, conversation, or any other gift likely to captivate the fancy of such a man. She is very fond of children, and has got none; she is very religious and dreadfully afraid of death; she has a large fortune, which he cannot touch, and comes from some noble family (she is an Honourable) who discarded her because she married a husband reputed to be a gambler.

If you think a man almost absolutely dependent on his wife for pocket-money and his dinner, is likely at his time of life to endanger his domestic peace, by philandering after pretty girls for the sake of their bright eyes, you are mistaken, Miss Legerton, that is all."

And Honoria was content enough to believe Madame Felicia had been mistaken.

Probably had madame used any other word than "compromise," she might have swallowed Miss Rodwell's assurances with less avidity; but it was an ugly phrase the singer employed—one as irritating to a girl's vanity as wounding to her pride.

It was maddening to imagine any one should suppose she *could* be compromised, and it was unfair also to Mr. Archer, a man at once so gentlemanly, so respectful, so kind. True, in the very bottom of her heart, Honoria did not like the friend who

was so anxious always to serve her, but she smothered that feeling, and became as time went on a little more cordial to him—possibly to convince the world and herself that there was nothing really to find fault with, nothing in which the most censorious acquaintance could detect even a tinge of propriety.

And then, as if to stamp the whole proceeding with the seal of rigid correctness, Mr. Archer brought his wife to call on Miss Legerton.

“I have heard so much of you that I felt quite anxious to know you personally,” said Mrs. Archer, who was so fond of her husband that she would have called on any one he wished.

Looking at the poor lady, who, indeed, was not young or beautiful or graceful, Honoria felt a stronger repulsion than ever towards the artistically inclined husband.

Perhaps, however, this might be because

a few evenings before, Mr. Archer had not expressed in words, but looked and implied a tenderer feeling towards herself than Honoria approved.

“You are not playing that air quite correctly,” he said, and as it might be in a fatherly sort of way touched her fingers as he indicated the proper notes. It was the work of a moment. It conveyed something Honoria could not have explained or spoken of, but Miss Rodwell being ill, and she herself consequently much alone in the evenings, she gave direction that for the present she was after six o’clock, “Not at home.” Up till six she was teaching with the exception, of course, of Sundays.

Therefore it was upon a Sunday, after the Honourable Mrs. Archer had been to morning service, where, for a wonder, her husband accompanied her, that she drove to The Ferns in order to make the acquaintance of Miss Legerton.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A RAILWAY JOURNEY.

ONE raw February evening Honoria stood shivering upon the platform of one of the London termini.

Christmas—season of dinners and indigestion had come and gone; a new year appropriately ushered in with successions of snowstorm, hail, and rain, appeared, and still Miss Rodwell's health did not improve. On the contrary, after each rally of a vigorous constitution, a relapse ensued more prostrating than the original illness; but this perhaps was not so much to be wondered at, as

whenever the rally came, Miss Rodwell insisted upon accepting such invitations as the postman still brought to The Ferns.

When a person attains the summit of success, it is rarely that he or she is permitted to remain on the hill-top so arduously climbed, so earnestly desired. Imperceptible to himself at first the descent may be, but it has commenced for all that. In the golden summer-time Honoria reached the highest pinnacle of fame she was ever destined to touch, and, lo! before she was aware of the fact, success began to slip from her grasp.

First, the rush of pupils became less great, but that counted for nothing, because the squires and squiresses and the rosy-cheeked daughters could not remain in town for ever. Honoria had made a good thing out of them, and was more than satisfied with her pupils' cordial assurances that "mamma hoped Miss Legerton would be able to give them

some more lessons when they came up to London next year." But what did seem to count for something, was that when a certain set of people began to return to town—not the best people in a fashionable sense, but very good and solvent and pleasant for all that—many of Honoria's old pupils did not come back to her; instead, she heard of them under the tutelage of masters, more or less expensive, nay, even under that of her old *protégé*, Signor Gonfroni himself.

This was very bad, and Miss Rodwell looked grave as the conviction forced itself upon her that Honoria's popularity was already on the wane.

"She went up like a rocket," thought that astute lady, "Heaven grant she is not going to come down like a stick."

Worse, however, was to follow.

Invitations fell off with an unanimity and regularity which argued some serious reason for the neglect.

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"I do not want to go out," observed Honoria to Miss Rodwell, who, sitting up in her dressing-room, was looking over her letters with every sign of dissatisfaction. "It is the greatest relief to me to stay at home, but still one feels not being able to decline. It is very odd, is it not?" and she ran over a list of the parties, she knew had been recently given, to which she and her Mentor had not been asked.

"Odd! it is more than odd," exclaimed Miss Rodwell. "It is some conspiracy. Your pupils leave you. We are not invited to the houses where our society used to be most prized. Your songs, the publishers say, sell only in the country. I wonder—I wonder if we have made a mistake—I wonder if it was an error to get ourselves mixed up with Mr. Archer—of course, there is nothing wrong as regards him, but perhaps people may have talked. There is no use shutting one's eyes to facts, but I am not



strong enough now to grapple with this difficulty ; I must go away for a little time in order to set matters right hereafter. Do not be discouraged, Honie, and remember, whatever else you may do or leave undone—*cultivate Mrs. Archer*. She has taken a fancy to you in a cold bloodless sort of fashion, and likes to have you with her. *Be seen with her*, go even to mission meetings if she asks you ; drive out when she calls for you ; accept her invitations for all her stupid parties, and try to get into her set which is indeed a very safe one. If you can sing for any charitable purpose, do so. There is an old Lady Gregory who gets up concerts in her drawing-room, for the conversion of the heathen, trousers for savages, and so forth, and she is particular to an extent concerning the vocalists, whom she so far honours as to accept their gratuitous services. Promise me you will make an effort. If once you lose your connection,

I do not know how on earth we are ever to get it together again."

It was in fulfilment of the promise thus exacted that Honoria stood, as has been stated, shivering in the raw cold of a February night, the while passengers ran up against her, and porters shouted "By your leave," and guards tried to seduce her into comfortable carriages, and newsboys importuned her to buy evening papers. She was waiting for Mrs. Archer, who had arranged to meet her at the railway station, whence the two ladies, accompanied by Mr. Archer, were to proceed to a distant provincial town, where the local authorities had decided that high festival should be held on the morrow.

Royalty was staying in the neighbourhood, and according to all accounts, royalty, having consented to lay the foundation-stone of a new hospital, was likely to have a busy day of it.

Royalty was going to drive some ten miles to listen to a long address, to take a silver trowel in hand and tap the first block of granite in a workman-like manner, to partake of luncheon at the Town Hall, to attend a concert (in aid of the funds of the hospital) in the afternoon, to dine with a nobleman in the neighbourhood, and appear at a ball in the evening. A neat programme of work to be laid down even for royalty !

Mrs. Archer, chancing to be a native of the county in which the provincial town was situated, had taken some interest about the success of the hospital, and having casually expressed a wish to see the ceremonial, her husband proposed that as a new cantata was to form one of the features of the concert, they and Miss Legerton should travel together to hear and behold all that was to be heard or beheld.

Honoraria had been dragged into the affair

against her will ; indeed, nothing but the desire to appear in public, so evidently under the shelter of Mrs. Archer's wing, could have induced her to consent to the proposition.

Of late, sopranos and contraltos, basses and tenors, had not been over cordial to her. By some subtle instinct they seemed to know her sun was declining ; and when she appeared in the artistes' room, they treated her almost as an outsider, while if she met them in society, their greeting was of the coldest description. Critics, too, the same. Where had the genial smile that was wont to illumine the countenance of men, who once wrote of her as "this marvellous genius," vanished ? A cold shake of the hand, or a cooler nod, had in a few months taken the place of the eager greeting, the warm acknowledgment.

"Instead of "When *are* you going to give us another of your charming bal-

lads, Miss Legerton?" the utmost recognition of her profession she now received was a careless,

"Been doing anything lately?"

It all entered into her soul, and had Honoria followed the dictations of her own heart, she would long since have retired from the struggle and society.

She knew she had for some reason lost her position, and could never recover it, and nothing save Miss Rodwell's entreaties, and an indomitable desire to fight out even a losing battle to the end, enabled her to bear the slights heaped upon her with outward equanimity.

Yes, there was another reason for continuing the fight, a reason she hardly ventured to whisper even to herself.

She met Mr. Daymes again occasionally, and though he did not come to The Ferns, she could not but be conscious that he watched her with more interest even than

formerly ; that whenever he could offer her a civility, or stand between her and annoyance, without attracting attention, he did so.

He visited at Mrs. Archers ; he was, indeed, more a friend of the wife than of the husband, and, whether deliberately or not, he often frustrated Mr. Archer in those little attentions that gentleman so delighted to pay to every good-looking girl and woman.

The time when the express started was approaching rapidly. Already most of the passengers had taken their seats, already Honoria's modest belongings had been stowed into an empty compartment, and finally she herself was willy-nilly put in after them by an officious guard.

"Room for us, dear?" asked Miss Zebulon, who, in company with four other male and female singers, came sweeping along the platform.

"No ; Mrs. Archer is coming."

"And mister, too ?" suggested Herr Drücker.

"Of course," said Miss Zebulon. "Well, good-bye for the present ; take care of yourself. We shall see you to-morrow."

And they moved on, giggling and laughing, and at the same moment Mr. Archer made his appearance.

"Where is my wife ?" he inquired.

"I have not seen her," was the reply.

"Sit still," for Honoria made a movement as if to get out. "I will find her in a minute," and he disappeared.

The minute passed, and yet another. The guard had his whistle to his mouth, when Mr. Archer came running towards the carriage.

The guard sounded his whistle, unlocked the door, pushed this last passenger in, and the train was off.

"Oh ! *where* is Mrs. Archer ?" cried

Honoria, jumping up in an access of despair.

"I could not find her. No doubt she is in a compartment forward. We cannot do anything till we reach the next station. Now, pray compose yourself. Why, how frightened you look!"

"I am not at all frightened, but I wish Mrs. Archer had come," Honoria answered; and she sat down again quite quietly, though she understood perfectly Mrs. Archer was not in the train; that her husband had never intended she should be in it, though as the carriages glided out of the station she had caught sight of Henri Gonfroni's startled face as he recognised her and her companion.

"I shall be compromised now," thought Honoria, "if I never was before. Not a singer who is going to Duffwich but will believe I elected to travel there with this man of my own free choice. All the King's



horses and all the King's men will never set Honoria Legerton up again."

And under her shawl her fingers clasped and unclasped each other, as she asked herself over and over again the question—"What shall I do? Oh! what *shall* I do?"

Guessing from the expression of her face the thoughts which were passing through her mind, Mr. Archer—whatever his original tactics might have been—at once abandoned all idea of temporizing, and boldly plunged into the middle of the difficulty. Quite frankly he explained the reason his wife had not appeared was because he told her Miss Legerton had been summoned to Bournemouth in consequence of Miss Rodwell's dangerous illness. Without the smallest disguise, he avowed for his companion a feeling he was pleased to call love. He told her the old, old story of an unsuitable marriage, an uncongenial wife,

which has been repeated for centuries in well-nigh the same words, and which probably will be repeated through further centuries until the millennium. 'Tis a story which one might suppose as stale as the "confidence trick," but, like the "confidence trick," it is always repeated for the benefit of fresh dupes.

Honoraria, however, was no dupe, and all his sophistry could never have made her one. In a sort of despair she sat listening to his words, while the train whirled on through the darkness, past stations, away into the night, piling miles and miles between her and London, but his words at first conveyed little or no meaning to her. All her faculties seemed swallowed up in a great despair. All she could think of was—

"What shall I do? Oh! what shall I do?"

But, at length, after they had been travelling for what seemed to her a month, she began to understand him.

Encouraged by her silence, he proposed that they should not get out at Duffwich, but continue their journey to a city some fifty miles beyond that town. There they could form their future plans. He would take her abroad—do anything she pleased; find a pretty house where they might live until such times as his wife sought a better country, and then, of course, he would marry her.

“Dear Honoria—dearest,” he murmured, taking her hand, which was cold as death itself, in his, and then, with a wild shriek, the train slackened speed, and stopped for the first time since leaving London.

Honoria neither moved nor spoke, as she looked out upon the platform. She saw, as in a dream, passengers coming forward—passengers getting out. She was pale and faint, as her companion saw when the light from the station lamps fell full upon her face.

"You are ill," he said hastily. "I will try to get you a glass of wine." And he jumped out, closing the door behind him.

At that moment Honoria's courage returned ; her senses came back to her. In some vague sort of fashion she had seen, as they steamed into the station, that another train was on the up line of metals.

"Guard," she said, in a hurried whisper to that functionary, who stood with his back to the compartment she occupied.

Her lips were so dry, and her mouth so parched, she had to repeat the word three times ere he heard her. Then he turned.

"Come here, quick," she entreated. "Can I get round to that train before it starts?" she asked.

He hesitated.

"I will give you a sovereign if you can manage it for me without any one knowing."

In a moment he had opened the door of the compartment and entered it, let down

the opposite window, unlocked that door, taken her wraps on his arm, and jumped into the six feet way.

"Take your time, miss," he said, guiding her foot to the step. "Now jump. All right; wait a minute," and he relocked the door, the window of which he had already pulled up, while Honoria stood trembling between the two trains. He was beside her again instantly searching about for an empty first-class carriage.

"Here you are, miss; got your ticket?" he at length exclaimed, and before she could believe in her deliverance she was seated in the up-express, and the guard, twenty shillings a richer man, was crossing his own van to regain the down platform.

In another minute the junction was left behind, but not before a gentleman who had evidently been travelling for some considerable distance, judging by his wraps and belongings, entered the compartment she occupied and took his seat at the opposite window.

Honorina never looked at him, never turned her head ; at first she scarcely breathed, so impossible did she find it to believe she had escaped her immediate danger so easily and so completely ; but when the tension relaxed, she began to cry silently and quietly, till perfectly exhausted with weeping, she buried her face in her handkerchief with a little gasping sob, which aroused the attention of her fellow-traveller, who, with cap drawn over his eyes, had been wooing sleep, and wooing it unsuccessfully.

Pushing his cap up on his forehead, he looked at the bowed figure ; rubbed his eyes, and looked again.

“ Good heavens, Miss Legerton ! ” he exclaimed, starting up. “ How did you come here, and what is the matter ? ”

“ Oh ! Mr. Daymes,” answered Honorina, recognising him by his voice, for she was so blinded with crying that she could see nothing, and then she fell to sobbing as if her very heart would break.

"Do not speak to me?" she gasped at last. "Do not ask me anything?" and thus entreated he went back to his corner.

Arrived in London he called a cab, and having placed her inside, took his own seat beside the driver.

"Why did you come?" asked Honoria, when the vehicle drew up at The Ferns, which was shrouded in total darkness.

"Do you imagine I could have allowed you to come home alone at such an hour?" he answered, as he pulled the bell vigorously.

"Who is there?" at length cried a shrill cracked voice from one of the upper windows.

"It is Miss Legerton," answered Mr. Daymes.

"It is I, Nannie," said Honoria feebly. "Make haste and let me in."

Next morning Mr. Daymes called to inquire how Miss Legerton was, and heard she was ill and not able to see any one.

Every day for a fortnight he repeated his visit, and with a like result. But his time was not quite wasted, for each morning he had a long and confidential chat with Nannie, from whom he learned more about Honoria, her past life, her father and mother, her nature and her struggles, than he had ever known before.

From Nannie, also, he gathered some information concerning Honoria's journey.

"She left here," explained the old woman, "to go to Duffwich with Mrs. Archer."

"Did you go to Duffwich, Mrs. Archer?" asked Mr. Daymes, when next he saw that lady.

"No. Miss Legerton was telegraphed for to Bournemouth, and I did not care to go without her."

Then Mr. Daymes' soul waxed hot within him.

"Poor darling, if she will only marry me, I will take her away from it all," he



thought. "What a simpleton I was not to propose long ago! I will not delay another four-and-twenty hours. If I cannot see her to-morrow I will write."

But when he went on the morrow he found the house closely shut up, and not a creature in the neighbourhood could tell him more than that a four-wheeled cab had driven up about nine o'clock, from which alighted an elderly gentleman and a younger man, who looked like a clerk; that the elderly gentleman had helped Miss Legerton into the cab, and shaken hands with her; that Nannie followed her mistress, after which the vehicle drove off; that the clerk had meanwhile been securing the shutters, and that at length the elderly gentleman locked the outer door and gate, and putting both keys in his pocket, walked off accompanied by his assistant.

"What can be the meaning of it all?" marvelled Mr. Daymes, as he took his last

look at The Ferns and strolled dejectedly from the door which had once opened so freely and so hospitably to all pleasant comers.

What the sudden exodus meant can be told in a sentence.

Honoria at length realised her position ; understood that from first to last it had been precarious and insecure to a degree ; that from the very first she and Miss Rodwell were living far beyond their means ; that the pretty house, this tasteful furniture, the lovely flowers, the charming dresses, had all been parts and parcel of a speculation, and that the speculation had proved pecuniarily a failure. .

In a word, the expenditure had exceeded the receipts, and, as in Mr. Lessant's case, when Miss Rodwell found herself unable to keep the ball rolling any longer, the game was virtually over.

Balked in their endeavours to obtain an interview with Miss Rodwell, creditors began to wish to see Miss Legerton. Guided by that subtle unanimity which prompts the actions of tradespeople, entirely unconnected one with another, they all began to wish to see her about the same time, and, perfectly bewildered by applications for money she had believed paid long previously, Honoria wrote to her chief for instructions, who merely replied, "I can attend to nothing now. Tell them all I will see to their accounts when I return to town."

Naturally, however, the applicants wanted their accounts attended to then, and Honoria would have settled with them so far as her small stock of money went, in faith that Miss Rodwell would repay her, had not a little circumstance prevented her doing so. This circumstance was the receipt of a note from a lady at whose house she had spent

the evening preceding her departure for Duffwich.

The note ran as follows :—

“ My dear Miss Legerton,—I am aware of your sensitiveness where money matters are concerned, but I hope as we are such old acquaintances that you will not take offence at my enclosing the customary cheque to you instead of to Miss Rodwell, who is I trust much better. How delightfully you sang the other evening, and how charming it is of you to add so much to the attractions of your friend’s houses! With very many thanks, always my dear Miss Legerton,

Yours most sincerely,

“ AMABEL H. FAIRCLIFFE.”

Honoria received this epistle in the evening. When Mrs. Faircliffe entered her drawing-room after dinner she found Miss Legerton awaiting her leisure.

"Positively, my dear," she said when repeating the story afterwards to her bosom friend Mrs. Tyndale, "I was frightened. I never beheld any one so hurt, so bewildered as she when I explained the little arrangement, you know, we have with Miss Rodwell. She did not say much, but I could see she knew no more about it than my small Amy. She made me take back the cheque ; she apologised for having, she feared, often mistaken her position ; she had erred through ignorance ; she would never offend in that way again. Really I quite loved the girl for her self-control, and admired her for her spirit."

"But it is ridiculous, you know," commented Mrs. Tyndale. "She *must* have known."

"She did *not*," was the answer. "I can, I flatter myself, distinguish falsehood from truth ; and there was truth in her voice and look, and eyes and manner."

There was such truth indeed that before she slept, Honoria wrote to a solicitor whom she knew, requesting him to call upon her as soon as possible ; and when next day he obeyed her summons, she laid the whole situation before him.

“ Have you any money ? ” was the only question he asked.

“ Yes ; about fifty or sixty pounds,” she answered.

“ Draw it, then,” he advised, “ and go out of town. Do not give your address to any one, and I will settle with these people. Tell me where a letter will find you, and trust all the rest in my hands.”

“ Nannie, where can we go ? ” asked Honoria when she had explained how matters stood to her faithful servant.

“ I suppose you would not like Antlet Cottage, miss ? It is empty now and to be let furnished. I think I told you Mr. Warren had married Miss Thomas, and that

the old gentleman was gone to live with them at the farm."

"Not like to go to Antlet!" repeated Honoria. "Why, I should love it of all things."

And so the next day mistress and servant travelled to Frodsham.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE TABLES TURNED.

HONORIA had been five months at Antlet, and felt quite certain that she meant to remain there for the remainder of her life.

From the moment she crossed the familiar threshold, and looked into the remembered rooms that seemed so much smaller than of yore, a peace such as she had not known for years came into her heart.

The sensation she experienced was that of a person who, having long staggered under a burden too heavy for his strength, at length shakes it off; and as she lay with



the moonlight streaming into her room, and that utter silence which never obtains in London pervading the country, she understood that the instinct that had brought her back home was a far surer guide to happiness than the promptings of her reason, which said, "Better go to some place where you have never been before, and try to make a fresh start altogether."

Everything in the cottage remained as she and her mother had left it. On the walls hung the feeble, scratchy, ladylike pencil sketches made by forgotten daughters of the house of Legerton—water colour landscapes—genteelly faded as the cheeks of the fair copyists had faded long before. Honoria, in her light-hearted teens, had derided and mocked at these works of art; but they were each and all dear to her now. She had lived, she had suffered—she had been exalted and her pride had been laid low—and she was come back to the dear

quiet home she once longed to leave—humble enough to have contented the wishes of Mr. Warren himself.

She had made her mark—all the mark she could ever hope to make. She knew quite well she would never write better songs than those she had already produced, and she was satisfied. No longer did she feel any desire to sit at great men's tables, and breathe the incense of flattery which once seemed so sweet. She understood her real station in life, and felt no desire to be richer or grander, or more beautiful than God had seen fit to appoint she should be.

She knew she could always make enough to live upon, for who comprehended better the art of living upon little? Since she left Antlet she had never once been out of London, further, it might be, than Richmond on the one side and Greenwich on the other; and to be in the country once again, to taste the pure air—to feel the sea breeze

fanning her cheeks—to be away from every one, and free to wander at will upon the beach over the cliffs, adown the hill-sides—alone with her own thoughts and God, was in itself happiness to Honoria, who, like Solomon, had looked upon the works that are done under the sun and found all—vanity.

“You must miss your ma’ sorely when you look about and think of her, Miss Honoria,” said kindly Mrs. Purkiss, who panted up to the cottage to pay her “duty” to the last descendant of the line that had done so much for her and hers.

“I have missed her every hour since her death,” answered Honoria, with something of her mother’s expression shining in her eyes, “but I am content since I came back here. Somehow I seem to understand now that it may be as good and happy for her to be out of the world, as it is for me to be away from all the

hurly-burly of London. I was often very happy there, but I am fifty times happier here."

"And Mr. Right, Miss Honie?"

"Ah! he never came wooing, Mrs. Purkiss," said Honoria with a smile, which had sadness underlying it, in spite of all her efforts to look cheerful, "so I mean to live at Antlet for the remainder of my life."

Next morning, however, Honie's lover did come wooing, not in person but by letter. He had tried to find out her whereabouts, he said, in vain. He had been to every place he could think of to ascertain her address, and it was only an hour previous to his sitting down to write to her that Mrs. Sieveking advised him to seek out the lawyer who had charge of Miss Leger-ton's affairs.

And then he went on to indite the words Honoria longed to read, words that soothed her pride and satisfied her love.

Ay, she was content, more than content, even while—tears well-nigh blinding her—she wrote to say what he wished could not be.

At length she explained why, reciting all the arguments he had himself used, and himself rebutted. She dwelt on the misery of unequal marriages; she told him that though she once was ignorant of the opinion of the world about such mistakes, she knew all concerning it now. Moreover, she added, she understood exactly her own position at last.

“If I ever was vain enough to imagine ladies, such as your cousin, Mrs. Faircliffe, Lady Comford, and so forth, asked me to their houses for my own sake, I am now undeceived. Had I known how matters stood, I would have gone to them either as a professional singer or not at all; most probably not at all. I cannot tell all the misery those false pretences have caused me,” she added; “and I would not have you drawn

into my troubles for any consideration. I am not really in trouble any longer, however. You may think of me as growing happier and more contented day by day. I am living in a place so quiet, that it would seem impossible to a Londoner. I never mean to return to London, though I believe there is now nothing to prevent my doing so, but I have found peace and rest. Forget me ; no, I would not have you quite forget, but remember me only as your friend.

“HONORIA.”

When she had finished and sealed her letter, and sent it under cover to her lawyer to be posted in London, Honoria went out over the cliffs, and looking through the gathering twilight down upon the restless sea, felt if not satisfied, at least that she done right.

“If he had but been the signor now ?” she thought.

After all, are not half the contradictions of life expressed by a little "but"?

At that very moment the signor was thinking, "If she could but have liked me, poor girl?"

Again Mr. Daymes wrote, utterly refusing to accept Honoria's rejection, and entreating of her to tell him where she was that he might plead his cause in person.

"It could serve no good purpose," was her answer. "We should only be the more unhappy." To which he replied, "That he would never rest till he found her."

And so, as I have said, the summer came and Honoria, who had not been strong when she left London, felt that as her health revived and her prospects brightened, the world was very beautiful.


As the sap rose and the subtle odours of spring pervaded the air, and the elms donned their "mist of green," and the waves began to glint and glisten in the sunshine, she

grew more and more thankful that in her hour of distress and darkness her wandering feet turned home.

She was safe there ; she was amongst her own people and in her own country. She was not at Antlet a vague teacher ; a possible adventuress ; a writer of ballads who had come no one knew whence ; rather she was regarded as the last of an old family ; as Miss Legerton, impoverished through no fault of her own, who had made a gallant struggle against misfortune, and was, out of the fruit of her own exertions, able to live at the cottage which she rented quite as naturally as though she had a settled income in the three per cents.

Pupils came to her, good pupils ; once again the tide turned in her favour, and in a small way Honoria became a local celebrity.

She might have visited with whom she chose, but the course she did choose was to





live retired as any nun, and to find her simple pleasures in music, flowers, books, and scenery.

As for Nannie, she was gloriously happy, all her old associates looked up to her with envy and awe. Her dresses were the talk of the neighbourhood ; and when it was known she had twenty-five pounds in the savings bank, the offers she received might have turned the head of a younger and handsomer woman.

But Nannie, like her mistress, had learned something of the ways of the world, and was not to be fooled by any man, however good-looking and fair-spoken.

“Get along with you, do,” was her invariable answer to her suitors. “When I had not a halfpenny which of you wanted to marry me then? What you want is my money and not me, and you are not going to get either,” while to Honoria she said,

“Eh, miss, it’s an old story now, and I

don't care to talk about it to such as them, but there was a time when I thought my very heart would have broken for the sake of a lad who went out fishing one day, and never came back till the waves laid him dead on the sands opposite his father's door."

Quietly as Honoria lived she could not remain unknown, and so it came to pass that in time the lady magnates of Frodsham and its vicinity, writing to their town acquaintances, mentioned that "they had been so fortunate as to secure in that remote region a most admirable instructress for their daughters, Miss Legerton of Antlet—Miss Legerton, the author of so many lovely ballads."

Amongst her old set the news spread like wildfire. She had not gone abroad, then. There was really nothing in the scandal about Mr. Archer. She had returned, like a hare to her form, like a fox to his spinny, to the only place on earth where it would

have been possible for her to set slander at defiance, to confute calumny, and give falsehood itself the lie.

Then letters began to multiply at the Frodsham post-office ; then Honoria found how astute her friends considered her.

Distance leads enchantment to all views, and if the good people at Antlet had magnified Honoria's successes in London, her acquaintances in the metropolis were not behind in imagining she was occupying a remarkably good position in her native shire.

"Though you served me a nice trick," wrote Miss Rodwell, "I congratulate you on the masterly move of retiring to Antlet. It was scarcely fair to make me pay your debts, but of course when you employed a solicitor, I submitted to the extortion rather than go to law. I suppose you will now marry our friend the farmer, and wear out your old dresses."

Honorina could not resist answering,

“ Our friend at Antlet Farm is no longer single, and I am giving his wife *lessons* ! I cannot congratulate you sufficiently on your approaching marriage.”

For Miss Rodwell was engaged, and it was from her *fiancé* that Honorina’s solicitor had extracted sufficient money to satisfy half of the creditors’ claims.

The other half he arranged partly with cash and partly with promises. Miss Legerton was to satisfy every one in time ; and, indeed, Miss Legerton was already doing her best to make that time as short as possible.

On the strength perhaps of Honorina’s reverses, Mrs. Lessant, when once she knew of her return to Antlet, indited an epistle in her most scathing style.

After condoling over the fictitious nature of her relative’s success, she went on to “ hope and trust ” she would be generous

enough to release that "poor foolish Mr. Daymes" from any engagement into which he might, "under a mistaken impression, have been induced to enter. His mother, the most charming of women, is heart-broken at the very rumour of such a thing. The doctors speak of her health as most precarious. Dear old Doctor Softer, who is to be the husband of your friend Miss Rodwell (he must be seventy if he is a day), shakes his head when I ask after his patient.

"'It is the mind,' he says, 'more than the body—the mind—'

"Now, dear Honoria, if you are not lost to all good feeling, set that poor mother's mind at ease. Fancy what her feelings must be, to think of her *only son* proposing to bring to that home where ladies of the highest rank deemed it an honour to be received as wives—a mere teacher—a person who forgetting all the traditions of her

family, her relationship with the Jerseys, her descent from the Legertons of Antlet Hall (who, if foolish and improvident, were at least respectable), not merely taught for money, but went out singing from house to house, a hired vocalist.

“I say nothing of your escapade, to call it by no worse name, with that Mr. Archer, because shame at a connection, however distant, of my own, so committing herself, arrests the progress of my pen. It is very kind of Miss Rodwell to try to excuse you, on the score of youth and ignorance; that may go down with strangers, but when I recall your forwardness while on your visit here, and the mischief you tried to make with a person who shall be nameless, I feel that the *worst* which has been said is probably far within the actual state of the case.”

Beyond this Honoria never read; she simply folded up the letter and returned it

without a word of comment to the writer. Already she had refused Mr. Daymes, twice by letter and thrice in person; but notwithstanding those refusals to mate herself with a man, who, her own common sense told her, stood far higher in the social scale than she had ever done, Mrs. Lessant's note prepared her to receive, without astonishment, a visit from the lady of Pinehills.

Honorina kept her waiting a little, while she tired her head and donned her very best garments, and tried to make the most of her personal gifts before she went down to disclaim any intention of throwing an apple of discord amongst the Daymes' connection.

At last, however, she was ready. Armed at all points, booted and spurred for any encounter, and conscious of those facts, she entered the room with a little air of defiance, which melted at once into softness when she looked in the worn haggard face

of the woman, who, feebly rising from her seat, timidly held out her hand.

"Miss Legerton," she said, "I have come to ask you to do me the greatest favour any human being can now grant me."

Honorina flushed a little, and drew herself up quite unconsciously.

"I suppose you mean, madam, that you wish me to tell your son I cannot be his wife. I have told him so five times, and entreated him not to put me to the pain of repeating my answer again."

"No; it is not that," was the reply. "I want you to send for him here<sup>\*</sup>—and say—'You are not the owner of Pinehills. You have no more right to the property than I.'"

"And why should I tell him anything of the sort?" asked Honorina.

"Because it is the truth—"

"She must be mad," decided Honorina but she said out loud,





"Pray do sit down—I fear you are ill. I think you must be labouring under some great mistake."

"Oh! would I were. I knew you would scarcely credit me without corroboration, so I have brought a copy of the certificate which deprives my poor boy of his estates. Look for yourself—you see the date and place of the marriage. Godfrey Henry Daymes, bachelor, to Felicia Merceron, widow."

"And this Godfrey Henry, who was he?" asked Honoria, so amazed that she could scarcely speak.

"Godfrey's uncle—the uncle from whom he inherited the estate."

"But why should this prevent his having a right to the estate?"

"Cannot you understand? The property was entailed to my brother-in-law; Mr. Daymes was a married man and the father of a son who is now living."

Honoria sat down. She could not grasp the sequence of facts as put before her.

Mrs. Daymes had been brooding upon them for years, and felt almost irritated at what she deemed dense stupidity on the part of her auditor.

"The case is this," she was beginning, when Honoria asked her to stop.

"Let me think it over for a few minutes by myself," she entreated. "It has all come upon me so suddenly that I feel bewildered. How does it happen," she added, as her eyes fell once again upon the paper she held, "that you only know of this now, that you were not aware of the marriage at the time?"

"It was a private marriage," Mrs. Daymes explained, "solemnized at All Hallows Church, in Upper Thames Street. It was kept quite quiet. We all thought Madame Felicia was not his wife."

"Madame Felicia," repeated Honoria, and the paper dropped from her fingers.

There ensued dead silence for a moment, then Mrs. Daymes went on. "They must have separated shortly after their marriage. He found out, I fancy, that he had made a mistake in more ways than one ; but for a considerable period he seems to have sent her an allowance. His death was very sudden ; he had no time to make confession if he ever intended to make it. Godfrey, my son, was abroad at the time, and it was when I was looking over Mr. Daymes' private papers, that I came upon the certificate of his marriage and his wife's acknowledgments of the money he sent her."

"Yes," suggested Honoria as Mrs. Daymes paused.

"Do not judge me hardly," entreated the poor weak lady. "I knew of no son, no child. I thought madame must be dead, as her last letter was dated five years previously, and so—"

"I suppose you said nothing to any one

about the matter ?” said Honoria compassionately.

“Come near me, hold my hand while I tell you the rest ; if I falter make me tell you all. I caused secret inquiries to be made, and found madame had borne a child, which she caused to be baptized in the name of Henry Godfrey Daymes ; but of madame herself or of the child I could learn nothing. Then I resolved to hold my peace ; then I said to my own heart, ‘If she or this son is alive and come back to claim the estates, it will be time enough then to face the trouble ; no good purpose can be served by meeting it halfway.’ Shortly afterwards Godfrey returned home and took possession of the property.”

“And he knows nothing of all this ?”

“Nothing.”

There was another pause before Honoria asked,

“When did you hear madame was in England ?”

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“More than a year ago, twelve months since last Easter. Why do you start and shiver? I know it was wrong to keep silence, but I had kept it so long, so long. Madame evidently had not heard of her husband's death, for she wrote asking him for money to enable her to resume her profession in England, and promising if he sent it to her she would never trouble him again. The letter was addressed to Godfrey Henry Daymes, and I opened it, recognising the handwriting.”

“What did you do then?” inquired Honoria.

“It was all wrong, all wicked, I knew,” was the answer; “but having kept silence so long, how could I speak then? I answered the letter—as if, as if—from my brother-in-law. I never told her he was dead, only sent her out of my own money five hundred pounds, and feeling confident there was some secret which had induced Godfrey to stop her allowance, begged she

would keep her word and refrain from further communication."

"And has she written since?"

"Never once, except to express her thanks for the money. In her first letter she mentioned her son, who was, she said, doing very well, though his heart was not in his profession. He had for some time met with but poor encouragement, she said, though he had studied under some of the best masters abroad and appeared in England under an Italian name; but a young lady, a Miss Legerton—it was then I first heard of you—had interested herself in his welfare, sent him several pupils, and given him some useful introductions."

"Do you mean to say," almost whispered Honoria, "that it is Signor Gonfroni who—who—"

"Is the rightful owner of Pinehills? Yes. He is the son of the late Mr. Daymes and Madame Felicia."

"Then, why has he not before this time laid claim to the estates?"

"Madame Felicia does not know that her husband is dead."

"But the signor knows your son; that is, he has met him."

"Possibly; but I imagine madame has never told her son one word about his birth. If she had, would he be content, do you suppose, to remain a mere teacher?"

Honorina winced a little, then she said—

"There is one thing still which I cannot understand. Why is it you ask *me* to tell your son that which you have kept from him—that you select *me*, of all people in the world, to be the bearer of such tidings to *him*?"

"Cannot you guess?" was the answer.

"Ah! I see," as the colour rose even to Honorina's temples, "that you have guessed. I am too great a coward myself to tell him how I have erred—how he must

suffer, and I want, moreover, to send him the antidote with the bane. For you love him, do you not, though you have refused to be his wife ? ”

“ Yes,” said Honoria, hesitating.

“ Surely this can make no difference to you ? ” cried Mrs. Daymes, in alarm. “ I always understood you would not marry him because he was rich. Now that he is poor—no, not quite poor, because he will have my fortune—you will not love him less.”

“ For my own sake, I only wish he had to earn his daily bread—how proudly, how happily, I would help him to win it,” sighed Honoria ; “ but, Mrs. Daymes, you set me a task beyond my strength when you bid me tell him he has no right to the property he has always looked upon as his. Get some one else to break the evil news—your solicitor—Signor Gonfroni—Madame Felicia herself.”



"No, you—you — you only," was the answer. "Do not refuse the request of a dying woman. Look at me ; I am dying. The burden of this secret—the thought of my poor boy's loss of fortune—station—have been too much for me. Oh ! Miss Legerton, for the sake of the mother to whom I am told you were so devoted, pity me—the mother of the man who loves you with all his heart."

"I will write to him, then," said Honoria, "though I do not know how I shall live through the hours that must elapse before I can know how he bears the blow."

"There is no need for you to write," was the answer. "He is here—waiting for me, on the cliffs beyond. Send for him—tell him the worst now ; but let me first go into some other room. I cannot look in his face again till he knows what he ought to have known long ago."

"No, stay here," suggested Honoria, as

Mrs. Daymes rose from her chair. "I can speak to him out-of-doors better perhaps than in."

It was only half an hour that Mrs. Daymes remained alone, yet the time seemed to her like eternity.

Then some one came to her. It was her son, and not Honoria.

"Poor mother," he said, as he stooped and kissed her tenderly ; "do not fret on my account. Only get well, and we will find some nook where we can be happy together. I am going to London now. I wish—I wish you would stay here till I return."

"Do you mean with Miss Legerton?"

"Yes, dear mother, if you do not object."

"I should like to stay my life with her, Godfrey," she answered, hearing which statement her son smiled sadly, and having kissed her once again, laid her gently back amongst the sofa pillows, and started off on foot for Ripley station.

"What will Signor Gonfroni say?" marvelled Mrs. Daymes. "I wonder what he will do."

"He will do everything that is right and generous, be very sure," replied Honoria soothingly; but still she was anxious to know how Madame Felicia's son would receive the news.

What the signor said upon hearing Mr. Daymes' statement was extremely simple,

"Oh! yes; I always knew I was the son of the owner of Pinehills," he remarked. "And so you have been holding that property for some years?"

"In ignorance," added his cousin. "The moment I heard my uncle had left a nearer heir I hastened to see you."

"I am glad you have done so."

"It will be necessary to go into the matter formally, I suppose. But of course I do not mean to dispute your right. Your

solicitor had better see mine. I shall not, however, return to Pinehills."

"Can we not make some arrangement about your remaining there? I do not wish to act ungenerously."

"Quite impossible," was the reply. "Even if I could bring myself to accept your kindness, the estates are entailed, and so far are not yours to deal with."

"The owner can, however, deal with them during his life, I presume."

"Of course. But I could not, and would not, stay in a place to which I have no just claim. There is one thing, indeed, in which you might act liberally—that is, if your solicitor advises you to do so. I mean as regards the back rents; I have been thinking about them coming up, and the whole of my mother's fortune would not replace the sums I have received from the estate."

"A portion has, I presume, been spent upon the property?"

"A large portion."

"Humph!" and Signor Gonfroni took a few turns up and down his modest apartment. "If you will do something for me," he said at length, stopping and looking his cousin full in the face, "I will make those back rents all right, and see if I cannot put other matters comfortable too. Is it a bargain?"

"I must first know what the something is."

"The something is this; I want you to take the first train down to Frodsham, near which place lives a lady you and I both know and like, shall we say? Tell her about this misfortune of yours; ask her to marry you; if she consents, get married as soon as possible and bid me to the wedding. You will not be a penniless bridegroom, and you know quite well it is only Pine-hills that stands between her and you."

“But consider—”

“I will consider nothing but that if you refuse you are playing at cross-purposes. She will marry you because you are rich, and you will marry her because you are poor. If she had only cared for me one-hundredth part as much as she cares for you, I would have made her marry me long ago, could I even have given her no better home than this.”

And so it fell out that in the old church at Frodsham Godfrey Daymes and Honoria Legerton became man and wife. It was a quiet wedding, but not a lonely. Most of the townspeople, dressed in full gala attire, though not bidden to the ceremony, attended it. Mrs. Purkiss, having provided all the bridal finery (Miss Honie, she told her friends, would not have a thread of the trousseau down from London), delightedly jostled shoulders with grim Miss Warren,

who, with her brother and sister-in-law, were present to see the show.

A certain countess had kindly offered to give the breakfast at the earl's seat, and suggested the names of a number of persons who might, she believed, be induced to accept invitations for it. But Honoria declined the offer both of the breakfast and the guests.

"For family reasons," she said, "Mr. Daymes wished the marriage to be celebrated with as little fuss as possible. An old friend would give her away."

But Honoria did not say the old friend was to be the new master of Pinehills. As yet no person had been told that secret.

After the modest breakfast at Antlet, Signor Gonfroni asked Honoria and her husband to accompany him into the drawing-room for a few minutes.

"I have some good news for you both," he said, when they three were alone with

the door shut. "It would be bad for me, but that I have known it ever since I was sixteen. When my mother married my father she believed her first husband Merceron was dead. Some years subsequently, however, she discovered her error, discovered it only when Merceron was really dying. Afterwards she married Dechemont, but that has nothing to do with your affairs. I am indeed the late Mr. Daymes' son, but not his heir; and so I am able to give you, my cousin, back your estates, and you, my friend, a husband worthy of you. Now I am going, but some day, when you are quite settled, I will come and see you at Pinehills. Shall it be so?"

But Honoria could not answer.

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And what did the world say?

Well, as you may suppose, my reader, the world at first did not like it at all.

The world said gentlemen ought to marry in their own rank.



The world said a fancy for Bohemianism ran in the Daymes' blood.

The world as represented by Miss Rodwell, Mrs. Sieveking, and others of the same sisterhood, said Honoria had played her cards remarkably well.

Mrs. Lessant and her world opined that "men were always taken in by such creatures, and that Honoria had not a drop of the Jersey blood in her veins."

But what the world said or thought about any affair that concerned them signified very little to Honoria and her husband.

They were happy; and happiness, like sorrow, is a matter with which the world hath no right to intermeddle.

THE END.



